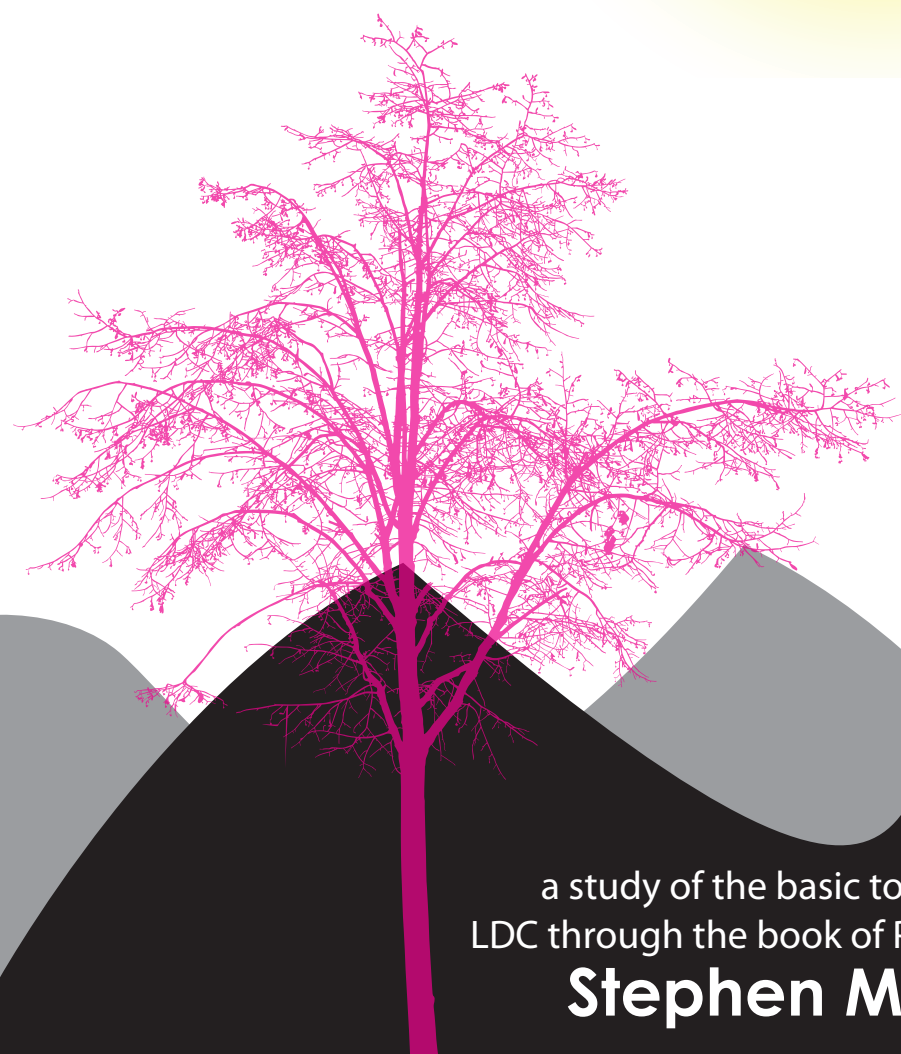


A 40 day leadership development course devotional



a study of the basic topics of the
LDC through the book of Philippians

Stephen Mayers

A 40 day devotional

*through the book of Philippians
on topics from the
leadership development course*

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The following pages come from experience in the leadership development course (LDC). The course is 40 days or six weeks in length and this devotional is also a 40 day experience. It will only take a few minutes to read each day, but will give you some thoughts to consider and meditate on.

For those who have attended an LDC, these devotions will remind you of teaching that you have received. For those of you who haven't attended an LDC, these devotions will give you a taste of what the training is all about.

Each devotion has a possible application for you to follow through on. I would also encourage you to say the prayer below for the 40 days and trust God to change you in these coming days.

A Daily Prayer of Consecration

Father, you are my source and vision
Jesus, you are my example and inspiration
Spirit, you are my comfort and strength

In this new day,
My eyes are open to see you
My ears are open to hear you
My heart is ready to respond to you

My lips are ready to speak for you
My feet are ready to follow you
My hands are ready to serve you

In this new way
I trust you in everything
I withhold from you nothing
I am willing to do anything
To bring you honour, glory, praise and blessing

Stephen Mayers

A 40 days devotional

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Day 1: Letting go and letting God

“If you cannot be teachable, having talent won’t help you. If you cannot be flexible, having a goal won’t help you. If you cannot be grateful, having abundance won’t help you. If you cannot be mentor-able, having a future won’t help you. If you cannot be durable, having a plan won’t help you.” Dr. J. Konrad Hole

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I was being served at the counter when an agitated woman tried to push into the queue. “I have a taxi waiting outside, can you serve me first?” The person behind the counter let her know that she was serving us and that someone else was waiting in line behind us. The lady started to breathe heavily and grunt and shuffle. “I am in a hurry and I can’t wait too long,” the lady blurted. I pulled out some change to pay for my purchases, feeling the tension grow in the air. As we turned to leave, the lady jumped in and said, “I know it’s not my turn but I am going next,” and proceeded to make her requests. The poor guy behind me was resigned to the fact that he was not going to be served next!

Why is it we love to be in control? I see these kinds of situations all the time while I am travelling. I was standing in line to board an easyJet flight when a guy came up and stood next to me. I looked at him and he responded, “You are scared I am going to push into the queue, aren’t you?” I couldn’t help responding, “Well you are, aren’t you?” “What’s your problem, it’s only a line?” he said. I wasn’t actually bothered, but it told me something about this guy: he was a control freak. Have you seen that film, “One Fine Day?” Michelle Pfeiffer is an architect, divorced with one son, who meets up with George Clooney, also divorced with one daughter. Their lives cross as their kids miss their outing, and so they end up helping one another throughout the day by baby-sitting the other’s child. Michelle’s character soon becomes clear as one who likes to be in total control. She likes everything organised, planned and sorted. She does everything herself because she can’t trust anyone else to get it done right. George on the other hand is relaxed, fun and spontaneous and delights in being the one to reveal the level of control in the life of Michelle.

Jesus said to his disciples, “*Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*” In Jesus’ day, if you saw someone carrying a cross, you knew they

were going to their death. Death is when we finally have no control. So taking up our cross is the process of giving up our own dreams and desires, opinions, self-preservation, ego and control.

Do you feel indispensable? We bring such stress, pressure and worry upon ourselves because we feel everything depends on us. The ministry we are leading just wouldn't keep running without us doing somersaults to make sure everything is in its place. The ministry can become our life, our security, and even our identity. Do you find yourself calling home or the office to keep up with what's happening, to give advice or to make sure no one is making decisions without you? Do people have to wait for your approval on many areas? Now, obviously you are responsible for *some* decisions, but often we fail to delegate and respect others' ability to make good decisions. Spouses can live in fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. Team members don't take initiative on any issue, as they know it will be checked and "corrected."

As I write, I am on sabbatical and it's a discipline not to check emails regularly. Computers are beginning to take over our lives and control us. The first thing we used to do in getting up was to pour a coffee and to have our devotions. Now it's checking our email, voice mail, text messages and blog. We are becoming obsessed and totally controlled by the tyranny of the urgent.

Jesus gave authority to a bunch of uneducated and wild teenagers. No wonder people thought he was crazy. He had no plan B. He didn't stay up all night worrying. He committed his way and gave his disciples to his heavenly Father on a daily basis. He let go and let God.

Letting go makes us vulnerable. We are put in the position of having to trust someone else. During a trip to Israel, my wife and I had the unfortunate experience of having our belongings stolen - passports, credit cards, computer, camera, etc. Everything we had of value was taken. There we were, in a foreign country, with no ID or money or means of travel. You feel vulnerable and there is no one to turn to but God. There's a letting go because there's nothing to hold on to except the past. The Israelites continually looked back after the exodus from Egypt and we can so easily do the same. "Oh why did we leave the stuff in the car, how could we be so stupid, why didn't we do this or that?" We berate ourselves and criticise ourselves something terrible, and end up feeling even more horrible. That's not letting go. "Lord, I made a mistake, a stupid error that anyone could have made. Would you help me?"

When we start a new season, a new job, attend a training programme, begin a new week, it's an opportunity for letting go in a new way. A spring clean of all the stuff we've been holding onto. Having my computer stolen (and sadly also the backup) was just that for me - a clean sweep, a fresh start. I had to let go of all revelation I had received from the Lord in terms of my journal and the years of messages on my computer.

Give God a chance - he knows best. We can trust him.

What do you need to let go of? Thoughts, feelings, responsibilities, ought to's, musts, commitments? Remember Jesus' words: "Deny yourself". No one can do it for you. I know we are all different, but I am aware that I have a choice when I am lying awake in my bed at night. I can choose to think about the issues that are concerning me, I can worry and think about what I should have said or what I could have done. After going around in circles, I usually say to myself, "OK, that's enough, I am switching you off."

Have you heard of the man who found himself on a cliff face? He was clutching onto the side of the rock with his fingernails and realised he just couldn't hold on for too much longer. He shouted out for someone to help him. From the darkness below him, he heard a voice speaking to him, "Let go and I will catch you." The man thought for a moment and then shouted, "Is there anyone else out there?"

If we are going to experience that peace that transcends understanding, then we have to do a lot of letting go and letting God!

Question:

What do I need to let go of? What do I not trust the Lord to handle? When am I going to let go and let God?

Prayer:

God, of your goodness, give me yourself; for you are sufficient for me. I cannot properly ask anything less, to be worthy of you. If I were to ask less, I should always be in want. In you alone do I have all.

Julian of Norwich 1342-

Day 2. Busy with what?

“We must have some room to breathe. We need freedom to think and permission to heal. Our relationships are being starved to death by velocity. No one has the time to listen, let alone love. Our children lie wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions. Is God now pro-exhaustion? Doesn't He lead people beside the still water anymore?” Richard A. Swanson

Philippians 4:3-6 “Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything.”

What do you do? What's your role? You must be busy? Are these familiar questions? When you work in missions, travel and speak in churches and YWAM bases, these are questions we get asked all the time. The women in the verses above contended at the side of Paul - they were part of his team and, knowing Paul's work ethic, I am sure they worked very hard. In answering the question, I find that I want people to know that I have been busy. Somehow, being busy goes along with being important. Having a full schedule, travelling to many nations, squeezing in another speaking engagement seems, well, 'spiritual'. Perhaps you have just had a day off and taken time out to relax and rest but we don't tend to share about that if we are asked. Why? Well perhaps it's because in full time Christian work we need to show that we are diligent. Perhaps it's that we grew up with such a work ethic that we are just not acceptable unless we work constantly and have something to show for our efforts. Rest is as spiritual as work, though, isn't it? The Lord set up the Sabbath and if it was good enough for him, surely it's good enough for us. But often we don't see it that way.

My excuse is that one of my strengthfinder results (an indicator into our five top strengths) is *achiever*. An achiever loves to accomplish things. Whether it's during the week, weekend or even on holiday, something has to be accomplished or it feels like a day wasted. There you go, it's part of who I am! Your excuse may be that there is so much to do - for instance running a family, having a demanding job, working in the local church, keeping up with friends and hospitality, caring for ageing parents.... You are tired just thinking about the week ahead. Are you busy? Sure you are.

The question is, how do you make it all stop for a few minutes to get a breather?

Wesley made a statement that he ‘wouldn’t take on anything that he couldn’t do without a calmness of spirit.’ Perhaps that’s a good test for us. Are we stressed? Do we feel we have too much on? Then start saying “no” instead of “yes” whenever a new opportunity shows itself. The bottom line, though, is what does God want me to do? In order to have a real sense of what God is saying to us, we need some accountability. How often have you said, ‘Once I have completed this assignment, got through this month, things will quieten down.’ Of course they never do. Why? Because we have got used to a pattern of living that is in the fast lane.

God has set the world to have busy and quieter seasons. During the summer months, fruit is produced and there is much activity in plant life. During the winter it quiets down. God had a busy season of creating and then took time to rest. We too will have busy seasons and quieter seasons. But often we can’t be trusted not to put other stuff into the quieter season and so we end up being busy all the time. You can tell someone who is being obedient to God: they can obey the scripture on the previous page and *let their gentleness be evident to all and not be anxious*. I feel like we live in a generation where there is an epidemic of activity, stress and abruptness. We don’t have time to be gentle. We rush from one busy event to the next.

Question:

Analyse your busyness for a moment. What are you busy doing? Are you too busy to do the important things? How is your time with God, time to be still, time with your wife and family or friends, time serving in your God given focus, time for recreation and rest, time for.....?

Prayer:

*Teach us, Lord,
To serve you as you deserve,
To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to forgo rest, (edited)
To labour and not to ask for any reward
Save that of knowing that we do your will.*

Ignatius Loyola 1491-1556

Day 3. Practising His presence

“To learn, listen. To understand, watch. To appreciate, contemplate. To do none of the above, speak incessantly.” Unknown

Philippians 1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God.

Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the King, was having an okay day doing his usual testing of the King's drinks. Every time he lifted that cup to his lips, he let out a whisper prayer to his God, 'I trust you with my life again.' He put the cup down - he was going to live for another day. During the day, he heard news from Jerusalem, his homeland. The news was bad. The city was just about derelict and the walls broken down. His heart was burdened. For the rest of the day he kept up a constant prayer to God. Question after question was asked and mixed with praise to his God whom he worshipped day and night. What could be done? The more he prayed, the more burdened he became. The following day, he was in deep thought and prayer while he was serving the King. The King asked, 'Nehemiah, what is troubling you?' Nehemiah blurted out the burden on his heart. God then performed the miracle of opening the King's heart to let Nehemiah head down to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and establish a community once again. He was a man of prayer, a man who prayed without ceasing. The strength of his leadership and the wisdom that flowed from him was a result of his life in God.

There comes a time in our lives when we make a quantum leap in our prayer lives. It changes from spending time in prayer to living in conversation with the Lord all the time. It's like the difference between dial up and broadband internet. With the old system of dial up, you had to connect when you wanted to send an email or surf the net. Now, with broadband, we are connected all the time. Praying without ceasing is an attitude of heart where our spirit is always active. The channels to God are always open. We move from thinking to praying, speaking to prophesying, listening to discerning, chatting with one another to interacting with the Lord together.

Paul knew what it was to practise God's presence. His attention was continually on the Lord, on how he could obey God's commands and serve

God's people. In every letter, he makes mention of the fact that he is praying for them - often with the adverb attached: always. It's hard to receive good communication if we have to rely on dial up! I used to check in with God every week at church. The rest of the week was mine and my mind, will and emotions were in total control. With my spirit half starved, there was no way God could communicate very well with me - he only had a limited time on a Sunday morning, and a Wednesday night if I decided to go to Bible study. It was only when I discovered I could hear God when I was on my own, that my spirit began to come alive some more. Over the years, I have taken time to practise opening up my spiritual eyes and ears. Getting into God's presence and staying there does take a lot of practice but it's worth it. I am not there yet but I am on the way.

Question:

Are you connected to the heavenly broadband 24/7? How about starting a new habit of talking to God wherever you are, about whatever you are doing - in your walking, driving, eating, waiting, talking and listening? How long can you keep those spiritual eyes and ears open?

Prayer:

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in mouth of friend or stranger.

Patrick of Ireland 390-461

Day 4. Celebrating your identity

I think history is inextricably linked to identity. If you don't know your history, if you don't know your family, who are you? Mary Pipher

Philippians 2:2-4 Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others

Psalms 139 shares that we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made.*” We are not like cyborgs or robots made on a conveyor belt, all basically the same except for our different colours and shapes. No, we are uniquely fashioned and intricately put together, each with our own DNA and fingerprint and voice pattern and, of course, distinguishable face. How amazing! There’s only one of me. Someone said, ‘Praise God!’ This is something to celebrate, but all too often we spend time condemning and criticising God’s wonderful creation.

Comparison - rather than appreciate who we are, we compare ourselves with others. What’s more, in comparing ourselves, we look at *our* weaknesses and *others’* strengths and of course we come out feeling rejected or devalued, depreciated, worthless, no good and inferior. Or we compare our strengths with others’ weaknesses and come out with a sense of superiority, pride, and generally feeling that we are a cut above others. What generally happens is that we judge others internally, which boosts our self esteem, puts us over them in the pecking order *and we find ourselves falling into pride.*

Conflict - the next stage following on from withdrawing or judging inside is to allow those thoughts to be verbalised and we share our disagreements. But we are stuck in our view. We are looking through glasses only in focus with our own personality, gift mix and make up. Anyone that looks different is therefore out of focus and wrong. So we stick to our opinions and become stubborn in conflict. It’s like the two people looking at a number on the ground. Depending on your perspective, the number is a 6 or a 9. It takes humility to see the figure from the other person’s viewpoint. Remember how Paul and Barnabas conflicted over their views and it became so hot they had to split company.

Control - the next stage is where we feel we are so right that no other point of view is even considered. People have to do things our way, think things our way, enjoy things our way - because we know best. Peter tried to control Jesus but he got rebuked. "You're not thinking of God's interests, only your own!"

So be grateful for your strengths - we all have them and they can be developed. Be aware of your weaknesses and take time to deal with them so that you don't damage others in your relationships. This is called 'damage control.' We don't want to be hurting others left, right and centre, without being aware that we are doing it. Accept your limitations - there are some things we just can't do, or can't do well, anyway. Come to terms with them.

So celebrate who you are and yield yourself to Jesus so he can use you for his glory. If you are going to be doing any comparison and conflicting and controlling, try your hand with Jesus, not with other mortals. He has a way of getting to the root of issues!

Question:

Do you compare yourself with others? Do you find yourself arguing from your position? Is there any trace of stubbornness in you? You know what to do!

Prayer:

Use me then, my Saviour, for whatever purpose, and in whatever way, you may require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with your grace. Here is my sinful and troubled soul; quicken it, refresh it with your love. Take my heart for your abode; my mouth to spread abroad the glory of your name; my love and all my powers, for the advancement of your believing people; and never suffer the steadfastness and confidence of my faith to abate; so that at all times I may be enabled from the heart to say, "Jesus needs me, and I am his."

Dwight L. Moody 1837-1899

Day 5. Damage control - identifying your blind spots

“What we see depends mainly on what we look for.” John Lubbock

Philippians 3:4-7 If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

‘It seemed so right at the time.’ Have you ever said that? We had launched into the property market and exercised faith to get a mortgage. We were thrilled to be homeowners with what was actually a very small mortgage, although to us it seemed huge. Then came an amazing opportunity. Several other YWAM staff were talking about moving to a new housing estate a few miles from where we presently lived. The houses were so much cheaper and it gave us the opportunity of a far nicer house. It all came together. Next door was a high school, which meant the kids only had a two-minute walk to school. However, we later realised what a rough school it was. We went through a very difficult time with our kids being bullied, rocks being hurled through windows in the house, narrowly missing us, our fences being burned, and generally we were wondering what was going to happen next. What seemed a good move, turned out not to be so.

We make these kind of decisions in our lives on a day-to-day basis. We come up with all the good reasons for moving in a certain direction, for acting in a certain way and it all looks so logical and right. We base our decisions on some history, wisdom from others, even scriptures pointing to their rightness, and yet the bottom line is that we are blind to some of the real issues.

Paul was very dedicated in his faith and had all the credentials to top it off. His identity was made up from his heritage, upbringing and training. His passion was to rid the country of this new movement called ‘the way’ and he was very zealous about it, persecuting Christians wherever he could find them. One day, however, Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and suddenly the bright light of Jesus’ presence blinded him. He was faced with his blindness to the truth, repented and so started his new life of passion for Jesus.

When you are blind, you just don't know what you are missing. If you only saw in black and white, people could talk about colour but it would make no sense to you whatsoever. Like the blind spots when driving a car: you look in the mirrors and yet see nothing, but there, just out of view, is another vehicle. There lies the danger, when we think all is well and yet we are on the verge of disaster. If you decide to pull out in front of the hidden vehicle, the potential for collision and much damage is very high. We all have blind spots and if we do nothing about them they will cause damage of one kind or another.

Blind spots can touch any area of our lives. I have known leaders with blind spots such as: being so task oriented that the importance of building any relationship with staff is totally missed; being married to the job instead of to their spouse; not being aware of a conflict of interests in ministry; inappropriate emotional attachments to people; a lack of awareness of how words and actions affect others... You can add your own to the list.

So what's the answer? How do we gain sight for our blindness? We need Jesus and others to speak to us. We need the beam in our own eye pointed out before we make the error of pointing out the speck in others! One of the problems is that, for others to speak to us, we require teachability and approachability, so they know we are not going to be defensive and jump down their throats when they share anything with us. In fact, the best solution is to ask regularly of the Lord and of our close friends the prayer David prayed in Psalm 139: "Do you see any wicked way in me?" We can also go one step further and *when we read the scriptures or talk to our friends*, rather than asking if there is any lack of integrity in me, we can ask, "Is there congruency in what I believe and how I live?"

Question:

If blind spots kill, what kind of damage control do you need to do? Are you aware of any way that you are hurting people through your leadership? If you are, is now the time to do something about it?

Prayer:

O Lord, the house of my soul is narrow; enlarge it, that you may enter in. It is ruinous, O repair it! It displeases your sight; I confess it, I know. But who shall cleanse it, to whom shall I cry but to you? Cleanse me from my secret faults, O Lord, and spare your servant from strange sins.

Augustine of Hippo 354-430

Day 6. The joy of journaling

Writing became such a process of discovery that I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning: I wanted to know what I was going to say.
Sharon O'Brien

Philippians 4:8-9 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

God looked at his day and evaluated and said, "Yes it turned out very good". Jesus, regrouping the disciples after their two by two outreach, said, "I saw Satan fall." They had been effective and had overcome the enemy. They returned with joy. When you are a doer, or in a doer type of organisation, it's generally not in your culture to stop and evaluate what you've just done. Over the past years, YWAM has developed much more in debriefing and assessment, especially with the development of the University of the Nations. When you are running a university, there have to be assignments, assessments and grades for students to know how they are doing and to compare to a certain standard of work. Colleges then have to reflect and evaluate their results to see how they are teaching and discern what changes need to be made. I remember after going through my degree, I was relieved to enjoy the next few years without constant exams and the pressure of constant evaluation, assessments, assignments and study.

Just as our organisation needs to establish a culture or environment for evaluation and assessment, so do we in our personal lives. If we are going to grow and develop then evaluation is always necessary. Life is complex and we don't learn just by going through experience. Experience isn't the best teacher; *evaluated* experience is.

The verse in Philippians encourages us to think about positive qualities, like what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. In order to *do* that, we go through an exercise of assessment. How do we discover what is true or right or pure? Well, we take time to think about our lives and the lives of others, and think about how to make the most positive contribution to God, to others and for ourselves.

At a suitable time each day, week or month, it's good practice to think back over the things that you have done, what you have seen, what you have enjoyed, what you have struggled with, and take time to assess these. At times, this kind of assessment is very difficult. Recently I was thinking back over some major decisions I had made in the life of my family and realised that the quality of decision-making wasn't good. If I could go back and change some of those decisions, I would. Now, God can turn our messes around and "make everything work together for good," but it's still difficult to face failures and mistakes and have to admit, 'Yeah that was a lousy decision.' This is the most important moment. The easy response after this is to get depressed and come to the conclusion that I am a lousy decision maker and always will be! That's the lie of the enemy and will cause an obstacle to growth. The right response is to ask forgiveness of all those involved, and then ask God what I can learn from the experience so that I don't fall into the same trap again.

For me, journal writing is one of the means for me to walk through this process. Journalling allows me to express thoughts, feelings and meditations on my life. It's a chance to be quiet, think aloud on the page and allow the Holy Spirit to guide my pen to draw out thoughts and be really honest about what's been happening.

Of course, you can do that *without* a journal, but I forget so quickly and easily that writing not only helps the process but also keeps a record for me to look back and remember. The Israelites looked back to remember, but somehow looked through rose-coloured spectacles and only seemed to remember the good food in Egypt. They forgot about the slavery, the beating, the lack of freedom and the fact that they were trapped with no future and no hope. It's good for us to be able to look back and remember the things God has spoken to us, the lessons we are learning, the processes we are going through, and be able to translate all that into growth.

David loved to journal. In those times he spent by himself, looking after sheep in the fields, he would take pen and paper (or the equivalent back then) and write his thoughts, feeling and prayers... and because of his discipline, we have them to enjoy all these years later in the psalms. Solomon too spent much time writing down his wise thoughts that we can still benefit from to this day. His evaluation of life led him to the conclusion: remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

So if you get stuck in answering questions like - What's God saying to you? What are you learning right now? What have you been meditating on recently? - journalling will help.

Allow the creativity of your life to unfold as you write. Each blank page is calling you to fill it with your thoughts, reflections, evaluations, meditations, conclusions, repentance, honest appraisals, prayers and musings. Again, as Philippians encourages us, whatever you have received, heard or seen through your journalling, put into practice and you will experience God's peace and progress in your life.

Question:

If you are not used to journalling, are you ready to give it a go for a trial period? What about getting yourself a little notebook and writing your thoughts, prayers and meditations for the next month and see how you get on?

Prayer:

*Teach me, O God,
Not to torture myself,
Not to make a martyr out of myself
Through stifling reflection,
But rather teach me to breathe deeply in faith.*

Soren Kierkegaard 1813-1855

Day 7. Engaging your spirit

“True spirituality is to live from your centre where the indwelling Holy Spirit dwells. It is in deep dependency upon Jesus to live His life through us, that we will learn to activate our spirit and to constantly hear and obey the Father’s voice” Mariette Louw

Philippians 4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Saul was having a bad day. The army had gathered, but before they went out to battle there needed to be a sacrifice and Samuel the prophet was late. The people were getting agitated and that made Saul agitated. He had to do something and the later it got, the more the men began to scatter. So he organised the offering himself. Wouldn’t you know it, as soon as he had finished the offering, Samuel appeared. Isn’t that always the case? Just a little more patience, just a moment to listen to God and trust him, rather than to be pressured into doing things that we regret later.

What puts pressure on you? I have a list a mile long! Here are some things that can stop me engaging my spirit and therefore stop me really hearing God in a situation: an inbox full of emails, a series of meetings to prepare for without adequate time, a difficult confrontation to deal with, when I have done something wrong or failed in a particular area... and a whole lot more. One other major thing that can tend to take my attention away from the Lord is being sick. The challenge is not to allow my spirit to be sick as well as my body.

There’s usually a battle that goes on in our minds, wills and emotions to see which will be in charge. And all of us have one aspect that tends to dominate. For me, it’s my mind that gets in the way. Then, of course, the next battle is between our spirit and our mind, will or emotion. Sadly, we can function without our spirit being in its rightful place of being in charge, but that wasn’t the original plan. Our spirit was supposed to engage with the Holy Spirit and to give a spiritual lead with a spiritual perspective. The spirit looks past what we *call* the real world into the *really* real world of the heavenly places.

When we engage our spirit, our prayers have a different sound - they come with anointing and with the agreement of the Lord.

I have read a number of quotes written by people in prison. They could have everything taken from them - except their ability to choose life, to

live in their spirits. They didn't have to come totally under the control of their captors.

Loren Cunningham's first book was, 'Is that really you, God?' The topic was all about hearing God's voice. Sometimes we relegate this important value to a teaching slot in the DTS, when it was meant to be the value of living in constant communication with the Lord. Hearing God's voice is to be a lifestyle, so that whatever we are doing, wherever we are, whoever we are with, we can connect with God and listen to his wisdom.

Perhaps in these days, 'engaging or activating our spirit' would be a better term than 'hearing God's voice.' We are created as spiritual beings who will live forever. Our spirit is to lead and yet it is often passive and dormant. So there is a need to wake our spirit up, keep our spirit alert, walk in the Spirit, sing with our spirit, and in fact do everything with our spirit taking the lead.

Question:

Is your spirit engaged? If not, what can you do to make sure it is?

Prayer:

*To the Holy Spirit
As the wind is thy symbol
So forward our goings.
As the dove
So launch us heavenwards.
As water
So purify our spirits.
As a cloud
So abate our temptations.
As dew
So revive our languor.
As fire
So purge out our dross.*

Christina Rossetti 1830-1894

Day 8. Living in the light

"I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self." Henri Nouwen

Philippians 2:6-8 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death.

The way up is the way down! When you get promoted to leadership, it's important to step off the pedestal that you are put on. People like you up on that pedestal because you get the blame when things go wrong, and you get to make the difficult decisions that no one else wants to make - and of course you get the sleepless nights as well, in trying to resolve those hard decisions with the fewest ongoing problems. The problem is, you just can't please everyone.

People respect the leader, however, who doesn't try to impress everyone that they are 'the man' or 'the woman' and that they have it all together. Everyone knows you are human and have failings, so it's easier just to admit it. We are all dysfunctional in various ways. We are riddled with fears, insecurities and hang-ups; we all come with issues. We all arrive with baggage; what's yours?

Jesus was the only one who was given a key leadership role who didn't come with baggage, and he still had to step down off the pedestal. He made himself of "no reputation" or, as another translation says, "made himself nothing." He knew what it was to be poor in spirit. He had everything, but didn't push his status. He didn't need the attention. I'm sure I would have liked to point a finger at those Pharisees and say, "Do you know who I am, buddy?"

The problem comes when position is all-important to us. If you start feeling important, and like the heads turning when you come into the room, or love to take the microphone and work the crowd, then there's trouble ahead. When what you do becomes who you are, it becomes difficult to share a weakness.

The Israelites crossed the Jordan and were ready to begin their strategic offence of the Promised Land. When Joshua asked the Lord for the agenda, he got the response that it was time for circumcision. The new generation hadn't been circumcised on route in the wilderness and so it was now time to make a fresh covenant with God. They were ready for battle, the enemy was cringing, and now was time to fight - but God said, "It's time for vulnerability". Circumcision is a cutting away in a man's most vulnerable parts. As an army, they made themselves vulnerable to the enemy. They could be the laughing stock and not able to stand, let alone fight. This was their test: could they depend totally on the Lord?

God challenges us too, to be totally dependent and make ourselves vulnerable by allowing others to see the real me - warts and all. People are looking for the authentic leader. The real person who says it like it is. The real person is able to share issues they are going through at the time and not just after the fact, when they have had the victory. People like to hear stories of weakness, failing and fears; of how we came to the end of ourselves and then how God stepped in to help us. They want to see real tears and real emotion, but strength of commitment, direction and vision. They want you to hang in, to be an example of integrity but to be someone they can relate to. Living in the light brings freedom like nothing else. Suddenly there are no secrets. The enemy doesn't have power over us any longer - nothing to threaten us with or use against us. We are free - and that's when we can have true fellowship. (1 John 1:7)

Question:

What stops you giving up position and status? What do you fear in being open and vulnerable, compared to what you can gain?

Prayer:

*In me there is darkness,
But with thee there is light,
I am lonely, but thou leavest me not.
I am feeble in heart, but thou leavest me not.
I am restless but with thee there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with thee there is patience;
Thy ways are past understanding, but
Thou knowest the way for me.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945

Day 9. Co-workers with God – the ministry of intercession

“By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes His glory to pass before the soul that seeks Him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort than a day's or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most” John Newton

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

I remember my music teacher would often come up behind me and press her hands down on my shoulders and say, ‘Relax’. I would tend to get up tight or be anxious about sight-reading music and would breathe a sigh of relief when it was over. All kinds of things can bring anxiety, but why? Somehow, when we can't quite control things ourselves, we get anxious. We hear of someone close to us being sick and anxious feelings can arise. Or we have a difficult meeting to attend, a tense relationship, a challenging project. We work hard to prepare, we try to fix things, to sort out details and then as a ‘last resort’ go to God and ask for his blessing or help.

Paul encourages us to be ‘anxious for nothing.’ That’s pretty black and white - no messing about here. Surely there are some situations I’m allowed to be just a little bit concerned about? Paul shared that the first thing we should do is pray with thanksgiving. Yes - thank you Lord, no matter what situation presents itself, its no problem for you.’

My name is Mr. Fix-it! When I hear something has gone wrong or someone is in need, I want to jump into action and fix it. Depending on which side of the bed I get out of in the morning, I can sometimes jump into the Mr. Can't-fix-it mode too. “Its useless, nothing can be done. I've experienced this before and it was a disaster.” I jump to negative conclusions and, in a few minutes, I have dug a pit for myself and jumped in to be buried. Things like - “I’m the worst person on the face of the earth, the project will be a complete failure, nobody can do anything to help, I will be bankrupt ...”

“With prayer and petition.” The news often causes people to go to the government with this petition or that petition. Are they whispering their thoughts? No. They often have big placards, songs to sing, statements to proclaim, and with boldness they present their requests with the

expectation that something is going to change. That's what God wants us to do.

The other day, we were praying about needs of children around the world. In small groups, we shared all the ways the enemy is seeking to kill, steal and destroy the lives of children. We wrote some of his strategies on boxes and began to repent for the society we lived in that allowed these kinds of acts to continue. We then brought the boxes from each group and made a wall in the middle of the room. We were invited to pray our prayers and take some action if we so desired. People began to get passionate about children in need and came up and stamped on those boxes, kicked those boxes and made it clear with a physical action that they were petitioning heaven on behalf of children. There was hardly a dry eye around the room. That's prayer and petition at work.

Is prayer our last resort or our first? If we are to have the ministry of intercession as Paul wanted for each of us, then we will do away with anxiety and present our requests and petitions with passion, faith and an attitude of thanksgiving that God has heard and will answer from heaven.

On more than one occasion, I have found that God has then put his finger in my life and asked me the question, "Are you willing to move into action and be part of the answer?" Praying like this is dangerous!

Question:

So what priority does prayer have in your life?

Prayer:

O Lord God, grant us always, whatever the world may say, to content ourselves with what thou wilt say, and to care only for thine approval, which will outweigh all words.

General Gordon 1833-1885

Day 10. Enjoying the secret place

“A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word, 'darkness' on the walls of his cell. “ C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

Philippians 3:3-4 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh - though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

For the last five years of my living in Scotland, I was part of a Presbyterian church where the minister was responsible for the ‘worship service.’ That meant the Sunday morning meeting, comprising of singing, offering, intimations, and occasional communion and preaching. Worship in a YWAM meeting is generally that time when we sing songs and express our praise, thanks and love for God. In YWAM, we tend to think of worship as a corporate thing - the ‘us and God’ relationship - although of course there’s lots of the ‘me and God’ taking place within the worship time. The danger is that we rely on the corporate to meet with God.

The heart of worship starts in the secret place when we are on our own with God. We stand before God without any trappings, without titles, accomplishments or status. “We place no confidence in the flesh.” We come by grace, and worship by the Spirit of God. Worship in its simplest form is expressing our heart of appreciation to God, connecting with God to love him. There are all kinds of ways to do that. For me, I worship on the beach best of all, or up a mountain or gazing at God’s incredible creation. My dog, who is a lover of creation herself, helps me get out regularly. If I am late or for some reason get caught up in other things, she reminds me by tapping me with her paw, giving a sad little whine or, the best trick of all, placing her face on my knee and looking up at me. Of course it does help that I live near Malaga by the beach, and my home is wonderfully situated, viewing the Sierra Mountains. Perhaps you have your own secret place that best captures your heart for worship. Spend time there very regularly.

But it doesn't have to stop there. We can worship God anywhere. I often find myself smiling as I walk down a busy street, as I sit waiting for flights in airports or as I enjoy a nice meal with friends. Why am I smiling? It's as if I see God peek through the clouds and look down on me and give his own little smile. He has given me all things to enjoy and part of worship is enjoying each moment.

I still love to sing songs; in fact I like to write songs myself - many of which will never be recorded. Those songs are just for Jesus and me. I can express my heart sometimes in words in my journal and it's nice to go back and re-pray or re-declare those words out again. More often, it simply comes down to thoughts of love and appreciation. The more I get to know and love my wife, the easier it is to simply lie in one another's arms without having to say a word. She knows I love her, and I know she loves me. We can enjoy those moments. I am just beginning to do that with my Lord too. Worship is being in love, adoring, being totally committed, and ruined for anyone else.

We live and walk in the universe on this dot of a planet called earth. We have the opportunity of blessing the heart of God as we worship Jesus who has been exalted to the highest place - a place of honour and glory, a place of power and majesty, a place that we respond to by kneeling and confessing, "Jesus, you are Lord." What a God we worship!

Question:

Where is your secret place? How can you develop your personal worship life in greater depth?

Prayer:

*O Lord our God, grant us grace
to desire you with our whole heart,
that so desiring we may seek and find you,
and so finding you, may love you,
and loving you, may hate those sins
from which you have redeemed us.*

Anselm 1033-1109

Day 11. Gathering daily manna

“When you read God's Word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, ‘It is talking to me, and about me.’” Soren Kierkegaard

Philippians 2:15-16 ...in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

The Israelites collected manna every day of their lives as they travelled through the wilderness. Imagine that - a miracle everyday. On top of that, if they collected more than they needed, it wouldn't last for the following day. No saving up for rainy days. Except, of course, the day before the Sabbath, so that they could rest for one day.

What a picture for us. Every day there is sustenance for us as we go out into the world, and we can expect the miracle of God speaking to us through his Word. Just as we need physical food three times a day, so we need spiritual food too. Yesterday's food tastes stale today. God wants us to enjoy fresh manna, fresh words of encouragement, fresh inspiration for the challenges of today, fresh warning for the day's temptations.

Psalms 119 says ‘I have hidden your word in my heart, so that I won't sin against you.’ The word of God strengthens us and gives us the courage to stand strong in the midst of temptations. Hebrews 12:4 says, “The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, and it divides between soul and spirit.” We need wisdom from the word of God to help us live our life with right motives of heart and with a clean conscience. This links to the verse above, where we are described as those who shine like stars - giving a clear standard of behaviour that is apparent to others.

How can we shine like stars? How can we live blamelessly? By being cleansed by the word of God. It sheds light on our motives, our attitudes, our behaviours and our communication. The word of God gives us our standard to live by. It's our handbook that guides us. The Holy Spirit uses the word to convict us and teach us the way to go.

So how do we take it in? There are all kinds of reading schemes in order for us to read through the Bible in different ways. Try one out. These schemes keep you on track and keep you disciplined even when you don't feel like reading.

Here's a plan for you to think about:

1. Ask the Lord for 3 - 6 books of the Bible to focus on over this next season. As you read them, take note of key words and themes. Read them in different translations to keep you alert and help you receive a new slant on the interpretation.
2. Identify 3 - 6 key chapters in the Bible that God keeps bringing back to you. Ask for fresh insight and wisdom as you study these chapters.
3. Look into the life of 3 specific Bible characters that you relate to and can learn from. Study their lives and identify the keys to their success or failure, the values they upheld, the principles they lived by, their relationship with God, etc.
4. Read and perhaps memorise 3 - 6 psalms that particularly minister to your heart. Turn them into prayers as you read: pray them over yourself, your loved ones, your leaders, your followers and your enemies.

Happy reading!

Question:

What is your rhythm of Bible reading? What kind of food are you eating? Milk or meat? And how much and how often are you eating?

Prayer:

O Lord, heavenly Father, in whom is the fullness of light and wisdom, enlighten our minds by your Holy Spirit, and give us grace to receive your Word with reverence and humility, without which no one can understand your truth. For Christ's sake, Amen.

John Calvin 1509-1564

Day 12. God's leadership course

"How others treat me is their path; how I react is mine." Unknown

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

When it comes to leaders, God is a great trainer and has a training school that he puts us all through. There are basic principles that he wants to teach all of us. He has developed a curriculum, and plans for each of us to do all the subjects. There's no final exam but there are tests for each subject along the way. There are no failures either. He just keeps putting you through the tests until you pass - or pass out! You don't even have to sign up or enrol. As soon as God breathes life into you, the course starts. You can't keep loving Jesus and opt out. He is committed to seeing you reach your full potential. David asked, "Where can I go from your spirit?" because God pursues us to continue on with the course.

The first term (each term can be quite a few years) is all about foundations: our "sovereign foundations." We start life in this world within a certain context of family and culture. As positive or negative as that context is, God is present and, if allowed to, will use the experiences as a foundation for our future destiny. I was born into a Christian home and had quite a secure environment to grow up in. Many people, however, don't have this blessing. Look at Daniel, who survived the overthrow of Jerusalem, only to be taken captive to Babylon, separated from his family, who were probably killed, made a eunuch, given a new name and then made to learn a new language and live in a different culture. He did great exploits for God, despite his trauma, and perhaps was more effective because of his experiences! He passed these early tests with flying colours.

The second term concentrates on developing our inner person, our character and integrity: our "discipleship training." Every experience we walk through has an underlying lesson to learn and God is looking for growth in terms of fruit of the Spirit, emotional maturity, strength of discipline and security in who we are in him. After I became a Christian at age 13, my discipleship began. I got involved in starting a Christian Union at school, which was very character building - especially as my friends

who were becoming Christians looked to me as an example. Daniel faced his first integrity test when he was given food offered to idols. During this phase of life, we go through many tests to develop godly character and right attitudes, and to deal with our selfishness. In some ways, we never graduate from this term, but continue to revisit the lessons, with the lessons going deeper and deeper each time.

The third term is full of practical assignments and often challenges the socks off us, in terms of experience in leadership roles: our “ministry development.” Our practical experience is widened and we learn the how-tos of leadership. We discover what works, what doesn’t work, and why. For me, life in YWAM brought many challenges of leadership in discipleship training schools, starting a mobile team, establishing an urban ministry and much more. Principles and skills were learned fast. We were thrust into developing our gifts of vision casting and implementation, running the ministry operationally, music and worship leading, conflict management, budgeting, time management, and generally being desperate before God. We can read the accounts of many leaders in the Bible who were thrown in at the deep end of ministry development but quickly learned the skills - like Moses who, having looked after sheep for 40 years, is suddenly made a prophet, a priest and an ambassador for the Israelites, suddenly put in charge of the task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt and organising them into a real community and nation.

The fourth term seems to come out of the blue: our “wilderness development.” This term finds us retreating to our inner life once more as we evaluate, question, think deeply and come out with a newly articulated direction, underlined with values that we truly believe in. It doesn’t have to be a negative experience but it is generally a time of reflection and inner growth with God. Wilderness gives us the picture that there may not be a lot of fruitfulness outwardly. After 10 years of being national director for YWAM Scotland, I had fulfilled the initial dream. I had seen the work develop to 120 staff, bought two major training bases, established several others with a breadth of ministry locally, nationally and globally. What was I to do now? I took a training sabbatical and so started the beginning of a new focus of ministry: leadership development. At the same time, there were all kinds of personal, family, ministry issues that I had to walk through. The result was a seeking of God like never before, and the foundations were laid for a “second phase launch” with bigger vision, broader influence and the potential of much greater impact.

David was happy to serve King Saul and wait for his own rule in some years, but Saul had other ideas. He was threatened and sought to kill David. David had learned so much when fighting in the army and leading his men, and had grown into a man of stature. Now he was to be tested in the wilderness. He ran and continued to run for some years. He mentored his bunch of distressed, in-debt and discontented men, and grew in depth and well as breadth of leadership. He emerged with a clear mandate to be king of Israel.

The fifth term enables us to focus on the passion that God has put in our hearts: our “convergence anointing.” All the other terms are moving us toward the goal of convergence. This is where our gifts, our personalities, our anointing, our desires and passions are able to work together and we can enjoy a sense of fulfilment in what God has called us to do, with great fruitfulness and effectiveness. It’s a great feeling to know what God wants you to do with your life. We can look at great men and women of God and sum up in a few words what their destiny in God was. Abraham was to be the father of a new nation, Joseph saved his family and people from extinction, Moses led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land, Joshua helped them fight for their inheritance.... Mine is to encourage leaders to develop themselves and others, and to grow to their full potential in God. What’s yours?

Question:

How are you enjoying the life course? Where are you in your journey? Are you enjoying the processes of each term? Are you enjoying studying and applying the course.

Prayer:

*Lord, if any have to die this day,
Let it be me,
For I am ready.*

Billy Bray 1794-1868

Day 13. Don't waste your trials; learn the daily lessons

Mother Teresa "I know that God won't give me more than I can handle. I just wish He didn't trust me so much!"

Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

My prayer for many years has been, Lord teach me my lessons through good experiences! The trouble is, good experiences aren't soul searching. They don't help us to debrief: "Now, what are all the deep things I can learn from seeing this event go positively?" When we do this kind of debrief, it's usually all about having learned the right skills and going through the right process.

In many ways, my life has been quite straightforward. I haven't had to suffer much at all. I grew up in a lower middle class home. We didn't have much money, but I didn't know anything different and was quite content. I went through school having lots of friends, doing well in study, seeing my friends become Christians and enjoying myself. Then, through university, I saw more happen spiritually, and enjoyed four years of involvement in the Christian Union, seeing more people saved, and developing in my gifts. Then it was on to YWAM, meeting my wife, getting involved in ministry, having kids and growing in leadership responsibility year by year. We have had our struggles with finance (big deal!) but that's been about it. To be honest, I haven't had many trials, compared to others I see and hear about.

However, I am aware that others view our lifestyle as very stressful and would not want to exchange roles. They would see living month to month with only two thirds of the financial support needed and not knowing where the remainder is coming from, as very hard. They would see moving home continually over the years as very disrupting. They would see travelling from a third to half of the year as too much, the time away from one another as too great a cost, and the continual stream of people staying with us, moving through, spending time praying and counselling as very exhausting.

Okay - that's another view. Many of those things we have had to work through and rejoice in to the point where it's not been viewed as suffering. That is, until these last couple of years.

I am not going to bore you with the details of difficulties these last two years have brought. The key thing is that over these last two years I have learned more about myself, more about my wife, and have come closer in my marriage and relationship with God than ever before. God is so committed to our growth. His ultimate goal is to see us becoming like Jesus. He would use good experiences if he could, but sometimes we just don't get it, though. So he uses life's issues and meets us in the darkest times and ministers to us so deeply.

Question:

Are you going through some difficult times? Rather than let them slip by and just bring you sadness, depression, anger or frustration, ask the Lord how they can pay you a reward? What is the gold nugget locked into this situation? Are you prepared to do a lot of digging?

Prayer:

O God, give us patience when the wicked hurt us. O how impatient and angry we are when we think ourselves unjustly slandered, reviled and hurt! Christ suffers strokes upon his cheek, the innocent for the guilty; yet we may not abide one rough word for his sake. O Lord, grant us virtue and patience, power and strength, that we may take all adversity with good will, and with a gentle mind overcome it. And if necessity and your honour require us to speak, grant that we may do so with meekness and patience, that the truth and your glory may be defended, and our patience and steadfast continuance perceived.

Miles Coverdale 1488-1568

Day 14. In transit

“A bend in the road is not the end of the road, as long as you make the turn.” Unknown

Philippians 3:1 Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things and I do it to safeguard your faith.

Like most YWAMers, I have a lot of war stories to do with travel. Years ago, Rite and I were leading a team to West Africa and the cheapest flight was with a Russian airline via Moscow. Unfortunately, it was before the wall had come down and security was very tight. We ended up having to stay in a transit hotel for 3 days, without any access to our luggage and with only the clothes we had been wearing when we arrived at the airport. How they could call it a hotel took some imagination. Of course, as a team we made the most of it but we were definitely in limbo - not able to go home and not able to go to our destination.

Probably right now, when you think of your own life and ministry, the life of your family, the life of your kids if you have some, there is some kind of transition taking place. It's actually part of life. As we all know, change is here to stay. We move from one phase of life to another. We change jobs or role-responsibility very regularly these days. People move on average every year or so. Technology is changing the way we live and communicate on a daily basis. We live in a world in transit. Nothing is stationary. However, some changes are much bigger than others and can bring about much more of a reaction.

Two years ago, we moved to Spain after having lived in Scotland for 26 years. Everything was different. Every day we were making adjustments to driving on a different side of the road, eating at different times of the day, having constant sunshine (suddenly we couldn't talk about the weather), not knowing where to buy anything, having a different currency, having no friends ... and on and on. These kinds of transitions need patience, faith and a knowledge that you heard right in moving!

One very important principle we learned was that when you move a plant, it can't grow roots and fruit at the same time. We of course wanted both. We wanted to be fruitful in our new location, but before that could take place, we needed some roots. Roots take time and patience.

Every transition goes through a tunnel. As you enter the tunnel, all the light is from behind. This light is what you have been comfortable and familiar with and has been a place of security. Down the tunnel there's just darkness. But you move forward. Slowly, the light from behind gets dimmer and unfortunately the light ahead is still hardly seen. In the middle of the tunnel, you feel lost. There is no light from behind or ahead. You wonder where you are, what you are doing and if you are ever going to get out of here. However you keep moving and slowly the light begins to appear ahead. You grow accustomed to the new ways, the new situation, the new challenges, and you move out into the light, ready to live once more.

There's always a process. On route, Paul's encouragement to us seems very wise. "Whatever happens - rejoice."

Question:

Are you in transition? Are you being real with how long the transition time will take? Generally it takes longer than we think and hope!

Prayer:

Fix thou our steps, O Lord, that we stagger not at the uneven motions of the world, but steadily go on to our glorious home; neither censuring our journey by the weather we meet with, nor turning out of the way for anything that befalls us.

The winds are often rough, and our own weight presses us downwards. Reach forth, O Lord, thy hand, thy saving hand, and speedily deliver us.

Teach us, O Lord, to use this transitory life as pilgrims returning to their beloved home; that we may take what our journey requires, and not think of settling in a foreign country.

John Wesley 1703-1791

Day 15. It's how you finish that counts

“It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.” John Wooden

Philippians 1:20-26 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Paul is writing from prison and doesn't know how long he has left to live, but he has a desire to finish well. We all finish! The question is whether we finish *well*. These few verses perhaps give us a few keys to doing just that.

Paul was called to the gentile world of his day, a pagan society and one that lived with a totally different worldview from the one in which he grew up. Perhaps this is similar in Western Europe today. There wasn't much to get encouraged about, but in the midst of his circumstances and culture he had:

(1) A positive expectation that he would not be ashamed. He had no doubts about his salvation, no doubts that the churches he had started would multiply, no doubt that he'd done what was asked of him by the Lord. That must be a good feeling. Do you know it?

(2) A sense that finishing starts *today*. Paul wasn't waiting for a rainy day to get his act together; he wasn't planning to have some fun now and then get down to business later. 'So that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body.' Lord, today may I declare your goodness and love through the way I live, how I greet people, the things I talk about, the attitudes I have and the way I behave. Habits and values take time to develop and we need to start today, so that we can go from one step of glory to the next.

(3) A choice to sweep away fears. It's said that the strongest fear is the fear of death and other fears spring from it. Jesus conquered death for us so that we can live without fear. So Paul could say, 'whether by life or death.' It didn't concern him. Perhaps in some ways the fear of others' deaths can be even stronger - the thought of a spouse, close friend or child dying and leaving you living. Can I finish well after an experience of the death of another? Lord, give me grace for that day.

(4) An absolute focus on Christ. "To me, to live is Christ." Every morning, the first thought was filled with Jesus, as well as the last thought at night and constantly during the day. We may have a long way to go, but we get there by "fixing our eyes on Jesus." He has to be our plumb line, our standard, our source and our foundation.

(5) A confident expectation of fruit. Just as a tree produces fruit, so Paul knew that if he continued living, it would mean "fruitful labour." Just imagine living everyday with that attitude. Today, I'm going to bless and encourage someone, the kingdom of God is going to be extended through me, my Lord will be blessed because of me.

(6) A commitment to people: "It's more necessary for you that I remain." Paul also loved people; he called them, "my joy and crown." He had many close friends and he made a tremendous investment into others. He influenced, imparted and poured his life out so that others could grow and develop.

(7) A concern for others' progress and joy. In our self-help world, it's easy to focus on our own progress and joy, but to finish well we need to include a focus on other people's development too.

Question:

How long ago did you start finishing?

Prayer:

O Lord God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same to the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through him who for the finishing of thy work laid down his life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Sir Francis Drake 1541-1596

Day 16. Two is better than one – synergy and team

Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow.
Swedish Proverb

Philippians 1:27-28 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

An experiment was done with some eight year olds. They could have one sweet now or wait for half an hour and have two. More opted for the personal gratification now than worrying about getting more later. So two perhaps *wasn't* better than one for them.

Generally we go for the special deals in stores - two for the price of one, or buy one and get the second for half price. Who wants to miss a bargain? Two *is* better than one in this case.

Have *you* found that two is better than one? Generally, I don't think people naturally think that way. In terms of leadership, we tend to think one is better than two. Two is more work and causes more problems in decision making, problem solving and planning. However, Paul challenges the Philippians to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel." He put it in the plural. I personally have certainly seen the need of having someone else to spur me on. I need someone else to help me be accountable or follow through. Marriage is good for me in this way: I have someone watching my conduct. Of course, it's helpful too for others to see how I relate and behave in my marriage as well. You need two people to demonstrate a relationship. I can talk about it but when they see it in action, it really communicates: two is better than one.

The value of having a 'developmental bias' is an important one. It says, "No matter what I am doing, I make an effort to develop someone else in the process." Am I speaking somewhere? Then take someone along. Am I working on a project? Encourage someone else to do it with me. Surely adding others strengths, ideas and morale must be good. Am I leading? Then do it with someone else: "standing firm in one spirit, contending as one man."

We read that when two or three are gathered together, God says he'll be there. If two agree concerning anything, it will be done for them. This agreement to meet, agreement through conflict, agreement in faith is a powerful thing. Two is better than one, because it adds up to synergy. Two can pull much more weight than the sum of the weights they can pull individually. Two can multiply the weight pulled. You know the power of the V formation with geese as they fly. Flying together, they add 71% greater flying range.

We aren't created to be loners, to be islands, to be isolated. We are to join together, to share, to partner, to be one. Think for a moment. What am I doing alone? What am I carrying alone? What am I rejoicing over alone? God created us as a body to function as a body and that means doing things with others. We believe in 'team ministry' in YWAM. That means we can't have a team of one. It's got to be at least two and usually, especially if a married couple is involved, we encourage a team to be at least three.

Whatever you are doing, whatever ministry you are working in, think two is better than one. Multiply what you are doing. Be one in spirit but multiplied in application. Two is better than one.

Question:

Right now, how can you put this principle into action? What are you doing that could involve someone else?

Prayer:

*The wires are holding hands around the holes;
To avoid breaking the ring, they hold tight the neighbouring wrist,
And it's thus that with holes they make a fence.*

*Lord, there are lots of holes in my life.
There are some in the lives of my neighbours.
But if you wish we shall hold hands
We shall hold very tight
And together we shall make a fine roll of fence
to adorn paradise.*

Michel Quoist 1918-

Day 17. Differing gifts – we need each other

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” Carl Jung

1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

We need each other. God’s creative juices were at work and after six days of work he’d produced a world that was lit up, shaped with oceans and mountains, full of animals of all kinds, and his crowning glory - a man - put right in the middle. But he wasn’t quite happy. Man isn’t complete on his own; he needs a helper - someone to complement him. Someone who thinks, feels and functions differently. You’ve probably read or at least heard of the book, “Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus.” It’s true - we are totally different and yet made for each other. If you’re married or have a close friend of the opposite sex, have you ever thought, “I wish they’d see things my way.”?

The beauty of being different and having different gifts is that we have different perspectives. I watched a film recently called ‘Vantage Point’ and it was the story of the assassination of the president of the USA. The film kept reverting back to a few minutes before the fatal moment. Each new take contained a picture of the terrible shot but from different people’s viewpoints, and of course the whole story began to make sense. If you took only any one of the views, you would come to the wrong conclusion.

When it comes to leadership, it’s amazing how we can feel or think we know best. Timothy was a very different personality from Paul. He was timid where Paul was strong and assertive. Timothy was someone who enjoyed following through and building the team, where Paul loved to pioneer and get the action moving. Yet they were on the same team, understood one another and relied on each other. God has given us such a picture of differing gifts in the Trinity and how they work together. Their value or essence is the same but they apply gifts differently. The Father produced the master plan, Jesus related to the world and built the team of disciples, and then died on the cross, the Holy Spirit came alongside those who believed to encourage, empower and strengthen.

Leadership styles throughout the world tend towards one-man bands, the big chief, the dictator, the ‘buck stops here’ type leader. Of course it’s sometimes easier not to ‘need’ someone else. Why process with others

when I have the experience, I know best, it's quicker and more efficient! Even Jesus didn't do anything on his own initiative, yet somehow we slip into thinking we're better. Lord, forgive us. Knowing what we *can't* do, is just as important, as knowing what we can! Then the question is, who can I link with in order to combine strengths and experience a synergy. Paul and Timothy - a great combination.

Question:

Who are *your* partners?

Prayer:

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
not so much to be understood as to understand,
not so much to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying, that we awake to eternal life.*

Francis of Assisi 1181-1226

Day 18. Living in fear - of God, that is

It was said of Aslan, "He's not a tame lion." To which the reply came, "No, but he's good." C.S. Lewis

Philippians 3:18-21 For as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

What's your image of God? A friendly grandfather figure? A strategic thinking, purpose driven boss? A judge who examines the details of your life and decides a verdict? A fun-loving creator who is there to add joy and inspiration and vision into your life? When you talk to him, where is he? Close, high up in heaven, behind you, in front of you, inside you? Close your eyes for a moment and think about God and try to see him, feel him, hear him, taste him and touch him. What kind of things does he tell you? Encouraging things, confronting things in your life, instructions and guidance, revealing understanding about situations, opening your eyes to see him and understand him more clearly? All these things, some more than others? Take a few minutes of quiet.

I often have this picture of an enormous eye - like in the 'Lord of the Rings,' but not so scary. The eye sees everything I'm doing, everything I'm thinking and feeling and doesn't take a nap. I can't escape from this camera watching me. Do you find that scary or comforting?

Paul shares with tears, that many were "enemies of the cross of Christ." They had no fear of God. When we speak harshly, when we criticise others, get angry, gossip, act destructively, are addicted to food or drink or whatever else we do, someone is watching. Stop to think for a moment. Our holy, all powerful, loving Father sees everything we do.

Paul was talking of people whose thinking was earthly; they hadn't met God yet. There was no fear of God in them. However, he goes on to say, "but our citizenship is in heaven." We've met with God. He's given us a new passport. We have a love and a healthy respect for our God who, if he wanted to, could turn us to dust by simply breathing over us. Like the

quote above - he may not be tame but he is good. This is the all powerful God we stand before - a little quaking is appropriate. A little fear of not making a mistake or wrong move is useful to restrain us.

A number of years ago, I was meant to attend an international strategy conference in Manila. I thought about it but didn't really take it to prayer seriously. The time came closer and when I was challenged to attend by my immediate leader, I started praying. I needed something like £700, which seemed an enormous amount of money. I thought of all the wonderful things I could do with that money if I had it! So I reasoned that it was too much and that I wouldn't go. Well, having decided, I felt relieved. The following day I went to my mail box and there waiting for me was a small package. I opened it up and out fell 50 and 100 pound notes. There was £1000 sitting in my hands. You may think that I would be happy. But I cried. I felt so convicted. I had been so lacking in faith. My image of God had been so small. That experience impacted me and renewed a fear of God in my life.

Question:

How is my fear of the Lord worked out in practice in my life? What does living in the fear of the Lord look like? How can I grow deeper in the fear of the Lord?

Prayer:

*Give us courage, O Lord, to stand up and be counted,
To stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves,
To stand up for ourselves when it is needful for us to do so.
Let us fear nothing more than we fear you.
Let us love nothing more than we love you,
For thus we shall fear nothing also.
Let us have no other God before you,
Whether nation or party or state or church.
Let us seek no other peace but the peace which is yours,
And make us its instruments,
Opening our eyes and our ears and our hearts,
So that we should know always what work of peace we may do for you.*

Alan Paton 1903-

Day 19: Personal Jerichos – dealing with strongholds

“Everyone of us pretends to be healthier and kinder than we really are; we all engage in what might be called ‘depravity management.’ ”
John Ortberg

Philippians 1:30 ... since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

From the book of Exodus to the book of Joshua, we read the story of how the Israelites left slavery in Egypt and made a journey to the Promised Land. It was actually quite a simple journey and God gave Moses the instructions. Unfortunately, it seems that part of the consequences of the fall involved making everything as complex as possible and the people didn't like the plan. So, rather than obey God and march to the land of milk and honey in 11 days, they took 40 years of wandering. Once the generation of unbelievers had died out, God encouraged a second wave of volunteers, this time under the leadership of Joshua. The first obstacle Joshua came up against was Jericho, a city with thick walls, strong people and a menacing appearance. For the rest of Joshua's life, Israel was involved in war to claim the territory that God had marked out for them. It was a long journey, involving many hard lessons. God used this journey to shape and mould the Israelites into a nation. We are all on a spiritual journey too and our lives get shaped in a similar way.

Our life is like the claiming of the Promised Land. It's full of cities that need overthrowing. Some are easy; others seem to hold out for a long time. Jericho was a stronghold in the land of Canaan. It was fortified, built well and protected those people within it. A city like this arms itself and fights to the death. Without a miracle of the walls crumbling for Joshua, it might have taken years - involving holding the city to siege and eventually starving the people out. The question for us is, "What's it going to take for some of our personal Jerichos to fall?"

The first step is to recognise that we *have* Jerichos. I guess Joshua did have a choice about Jericho. He didn't have to attack the city; he could have gone around it and made settlements between the cities. Why go to all the hard work of fighting and being in danger of casualties and death? Couldn't they learn to live with the people of the land? Actually, this is what we do in our lives and relationships all the time. Where there is a difficult issue in friendship or marriage, we just avoid talking about it. After some years, some "no go" areas have emerged, where we don't talk

about our unmet needs of emotional support or romance, or we don't seek to confront negative attitudes and bad habits, or deal with the fact that our lives are slowly growing apart from one another. We tolerate all the issues and keep our heads down, avoid the arguments and hope that everything will be fine. As the years go by, the Jerichos are increasing in number and it's getting more difficult to avoid them.

Let me introduce you to a few of my Jerichos! I won't go into detail here but simply give you an inside look at a couple of my personal strongholds. You will need to identify your own and work out the strategy of attack from the Lord. To overcome strongholds takes healing of lies that we have been holding on to, working through forgiveness, renewing of our minds, establishing new habit patterns and, through it all, listening to what God has to say.

Unbelief: My personality has a bent towards thinking about the pros and cons of a decision or seeing all the consequences of an action. When any suggestion is made, I can come up with lots of reasons why it may not work. Over the years I have developed from giving reasons why it won't work to recognising the need of seeing all the possibilities and deciding the way forward with objectivity. I have moved on from simply biting my tongue to stop me sharing the negative immediately, to enjoying brainstorming and thinking creatively about the idea. As an individual, though, in my honest moments I own up to the fact that I can be pessimistic, negative, wary, cautious and fearful. These words all add up to the potential for unbelief. Unbelief is the stronghold that weaves its way into so many areas of our lives. Unbelief stops me from taking risks, stepping out in obedience to God, trusting God for my life choices and believing God can use me or speak to me. We read the story of the exodus and can't understand why the Israelites continually fell into unbelief, and yet we follow in their footsteps.

Gossip: It starts out so innocently. I am simply sharing news about a situation. In doing so, it is very difficult to not bring a bias of my opinion into the communication. What is appropriate to pass on? What level of information should I share? It's a constant dilemma in leadership teams. How much information do you share about a person who is going through difficulties? If you come out of that meeting and find you approach that person with a wary spirit, or are uncomfortable with them, too much information has probably been shared. We talk so much about people but pray so little. One of my goals has been to pray about someone's difficulties more than to talk about them. Somehow it's always so much easier to talk about the negative than the positive. We talk in excited

whispers about the latest scandal and yet we often neglect to talk about the blessings and things we can be thankful for. We live in extremes. We don't share about the issues in our lives that we should, but do share about the issues of others that we shouldn't.

I could go on to talk about offence, judgement, workaholism and a whole lot more, but I will leave it there. It takes an honest look at our lives to recognise that we have dysfunction that needs addressing.

Question:

Are you aware of your Jerichos? We all have them. Pray and ask the Lord, "What are the 3 strongest cities in your life that need to be overcome?" Now what are the steps and strategy to begin the conquest (or to continue with it)?

Prayer:

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbour. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give.

Martin Luther 1483-1546

Day 20. Leadership lies

“The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross... Here we touch the most important quality of Christian leadership in the future. It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility, in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.” Henri Nouwen

Philippians 3:4-7 If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

My colleague tells a story of a leadership team that he was involved in some years ago. During one of their meetings, there was a slot for sharing personal needs. Going around the room, they responded one after the other that they were all “fine”! However, just one month later one of those “fine” leaders had to take 6 months off work due to burn out. So what’s the conclusion? Leaders are liars? Well, not exactly, but sometimes they can be out of touch with how they are really doing. It is the latter topic that I want to address in this devotional. The point that we can believe certain things that turn out to be lies. That leader who experienced burn out thought he was “fine” but it turned out to be a lie. He was blinded to reality. I would like us to think about the lies we can be drawn in to believe as leaders. What lies do you believe? Perhaps it’s a silly question. If we knew that we believed lies, we’d stop immediately, wouldn’t we? The problem with lies is, they are so deceptive. Over the past couple of years, through my involvement in leadership development courses, I have seen how many leaders have been fed lies as babies and children and have continued to believe those lies years later in full adulthood. Lies to do with abandonment, rejection, shame, lack of value, lies of not being gifted or anointed, of failure, being doomed... the list goes on. The encouragement has come when truth has replaced those lies and leaders have been wonderfully set free. The turning point is when Jesus meets them, speaks into those lies living in their memories, and brings truth - new perspective and insight into their lives and the assurance that old things are passed away and all things become new.

The problem goes deeper. We generally learn by imitation. I thought it was only kids who learned by imitation, but I have come to realise we're all just grown up kids. We copy one another, and unfortunately that means faults and all. We live in homes with parents who are our first models of leadership. Mistakes are made, models are created and lies are put into our foundations. We go to school and have teachers who become our new authority figures. As much as we rebelled against their style, they influenced the way we thought about leadership and more lies were put in our foundations from any negative styles modelled. Then we go to church. We look up to the pastor, elders and leaders and they make some mistakes too. They perhaps give wrong modelling and all the time the lies are getting deeper and deeper. One day we wake up and realise that values have been built into our lives through the leaders we have looked up to. Hopefully some good ones, but often some not so good ones are thrown in. It's the lies of the latter that I am addressing here.

Leadership isn't just a function or a responsibility to fulfil. You can't just put on a hat and become a great leader. No, it takes digging deep foundations and building our lives on "Christ the solid rock". Lies that are part of our lives need to be dug up, insecurities brought to the surface, fears uncovered, and godly leadership values put in their place.

Jesus rebuked Peter because he had the wrong interests at heart. He didn't understand the need of Jesus going to the cross to bear the sin of the whole world. What aspects of leadership do we have all wrong?

Here are some lies that need to be dealt with. Add your own to the list:

1. **Leadership is singular** - Luke 6:12. Jesus didn't model a one-man band. He chose twelve men and a smaller group of three to work more closely with. Somehow we have come to believe that leaders have to be supermen and women and do it all alone!
2. **Leadership is simply fulfilling a task** - Luke 6:17. Jesus knew there was a clear task ahead of him but he developed people to fulfil the task. The first thing he did was to ask some disciples back to his home. He took time to teach them and "be with them" (Mark 3:14)
3. **Leadership is all about personal charisma** - Luke 7. The centurion knew that the issue for Jesus was having spiritual authority. He didn't have to be there and make a show of how powerful he was. All he needed to do was to "say the word".
4. **Leadership should have status and special treatment** - Luke 7:36. Simon kept one step above Jesus by not honouring him and washing his feet as he entered his home. Then he looked down on Jesus because he gave room for and honoured the street woman who washed his feet.

5. **Leadership is being seen to run the show** - Luke 9. Jesus took the risk of delegating responsibility and authority, and sent out the 12 and then the 72 to preach, heal and cast out demons.
6. **Leadership is telling people what they need to know** - Luke 9:18. Jesus encouraged his disciples to hear God for themselves and affirmed Peter as he shared his revelation.
7. **Leadership is about title and position** - Luke 9:46. Jesus gave feedback to the disciples after their argument about who was the greatest, and showed them that leaders need to step off the pedestal that others put them on. Leaders are called to be servants of all.
8. **Leadership is about power** - Luke 9:51. The sons of thunder wanted to call down fire from heaven, but Jesus wanted to give mercy and grace, and model humility.
9. **Leadership is about being busy** - Luke 10:25. The Good Samaritan made time for the dying man, while the other leaders had to keep to their agendas. Jesus always had time for God's agenda.
10. **Leadership is about keeping up a good outward impression** - Luke 11:39, The Pharisees were only concerned about cleaning the outside and not the inside. Jesus made it clear that it's all about the state of our hearts before God and walking in integrity.

Question:

So where do we go from here? Ask: what are the lies that I have believed about leadership? Bring them to Jesus. Ask: what is the root cause or experience that formed the foundation of the lie in my life? Let God speak the truth and impart the true values; start being a leader of a different breed - the Jesus kind.

Prayer:

*Sever me from myself that I may be grateful to you;
 May I perish to myself that I may be safe in you
 May I die to myself that I may live in you;
 May I wither to myself that I may blossom in you;
 May I be emptied of myself that I may abound in you;
 May I be nothing to myself that I may be all to you.*

Desiderius Erasmus 1469-1536

Day 21. Creating a culture of blessing

“You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.” Henry Drummond

Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Imagine, for a moment, living in the land of enchantment where everything is positive and good. There are no bad attitudes. No down days where you feel sorry for yourself. No gossip or secret whispering going on for the sharing of the latest scandal. No putting down of others that makes them feel bad. No comparison going on and the underlying competition or rejection that goes with it. No course words, sarcasm, critical or judgemental attitudes or actions. No attention seeking or political manoeuvring to get your agenda on the table. Unfortunately the world we live in is very negative. Sad, isn't it? In fact, the more we live in it, the more we get used to it and the more polluted we can become. We're fed this culture and even make it a part of our entertainment. We laugh at the expense of others. We have game shows on TV that are viewed by millions, that are plain 'mean' to the contenders who I'm sure come away with a sense of failure, put down and rejection. How would that make you feel?

Jesus of course is an example that Paul turns to. He had nothing of selfish ambition - he came to serve, not to be served. He put aside his deity in order to be sacrificed for us. Jesus was very attractive to people. They were drawn to him, but it wasn't attention seeking. He was attractive because he loved so purely. He blessed people. People felt differently just being around him. The woman caught in adultery went away without being judged and negative about herself. Jesus blessed her. Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus the tax collector and invited himself to tea; he was thinking of the interests of others - not the criticism that would come to him for keeping the wrong company.

This enchanted world we referred to is what life in the kingdom is all about and Paul encouraged us to start living this way now. Jesus came to redeem our tongues from the dark side. Our mouth is designed to give blessing and encouragement. Our face is designed to warm others through

its smile. Our hands were created to serve and help others in whatever need they have. Our feet were given us to take the good news to others.

We had an African friend coming to the new church plant in our home in Spain and, although just a young Christian, he brought a fragrance of blessing wherever he went. His constant comment in conversation was "What a joy!" He was creating a culture of blessing around him and we can all do the same. Today, as long as it's still called today, bless, encourage, build up, comfort, and help. Create this culture of blessing wherever you go today.

Question:

Can I give you a challenge? For one day, take an inventory of your words and actions towards others. Count the times you bless others, do things for them, support them, encourage and affirm them. If this isn't a regular part of your day, where and how can you start to build it into your life?

Prayer to bless others:

*May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm on your face,
The rain fall softly on your fields;
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

A Gaelic Blessing

Day 22. My house is your house

“People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Unknown

Philippians 2:29-30 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Philippians 4:21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever come away from staying with someone with the feeling, “I really felt welcomed and cared for?” That gift of hospitality is wonderful to experience, isn’t it? Sometimes we reduce it to a department or an activity, but it’s a ministry that we as leaders all need to share the joy of. Jesus’ first words to disciples wanting to know more about him were, “Come home for tea.” Hospitality was a value that Jesus took hold of and lived his whole life. I was blessed growing up in a home where I could invite anyone at any time for a meal and it was no big deal. I think I took it for granted and only later realised that this isn’t the norm. However, on one trip in the U.S. I saw this ministry taken to a whole new level and its importance has stayed with me ever since.

Rite and I were taking a ministry team on a tour up the west coast, heading to Canada. We had stopped off in Oregon at the church of one of our staff. The pastor greeted us and gave us a warm welcome. We were given the platform to share and they fed us very well. Rite was very pregnant at the time and, as a poor YWAMer, she had very few dresses. The pastor’s wife offered to make her a couple of dresses, as she was a seamstress, which of course we were delighted about. After having been spoilt by this couple (all eight of us) for several days, they took us out for a final meal and sent us on our way. Before saying goodbye, the pastor took us to the gas station and was about to pay when I jumped in and said, “You have been so kind to us already; you don’t need to pay for our gas too.” To which he replied, “Ever since coming into the ministry, we have made a commitment to treat everyone who visits us as if they were Jesus, and it’s a pleasure to do so.” And with that he went and paid the bill. We came away feeling very cared for and humbled by the whole experience.

As the verse above shares, hospitality is a value that needs to be followed by all believers and especially leaders. We are commanded in Romans to

“be hospitable.” To make people feel at home, to honour them, to encourage them, to bless them... in fact, hospitality is living out all of the “one anothers” of scripture. Jesus started his ministry with hospitality, as we have already seen, ended it with hospitality as he invites the disciples who hadn’t caught a single fish to come and have some fish for breakfast on the beach, and enjoyed hospitality all through his ministry. It’s hard to find a time when Jesus wasn’t having a meal with someone somewhere or just making someone feel loved as he sat at a well and offered a glass of everlasting water. From that first greeting of Jesus, the woman knew she was valued. Maybe that’s what it means to “greet all the saints in Christ Jesus.” Even as we say hello to people, the fragrance and welcome of Jesus flow through us.

Question:

How are you doing on your greetings, welcomes and invitations to people to share your life?

Prayer:

Lord

Isn't your creation wasteful?

Fruits never equal

The seedlings' abundance.

Springs scatter water.

The sun gives out

Enormous light.

May your bounty teach me

Greatness of heart.

May your magnificence

Stop me bring mean.

Seeing you a prodigal

And open-handed giver

Let me give unstintingly

Like a king's son

Like God's own.

Archbishop Helder Camara 1909-

Day 23. Begin with the end in mind

You have to know where you're going! You cannot be like Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* who asks the Cheshire cat: "Would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends on where you want to get to," the cat replies. "I don't care much where," she answers. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," the cat responds.

Philippians 2:2 Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Imagine for a moment that you were eavesdropping on the Trinity just before they created the world. What do you think you would hear? "Let's just create some sparks and see what happens?" or "Perhaps we can have a pilot project and create something then see where we go from there?" Or perhaps it was a little more organised and there was actually a plan. We actually know that the Trinity agreed together on how the world was going to take shape, and that mankind was a clear vision for them. "Let us make man in our image" - a creature that would have their ability to choose, create and love.

So when it comes to our own lives, what is our approach? "Let's just take one day at a time" or, "This is my passion and I am going to work towards it with all my energy." Jesus made us all in a unique way with specific gifts and callings. We can please the Lord when we begin to go down the road that he has marked out for us. Jesus stood up in the synagogue and said, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...*" Luke 4:18 Although Jesus had a hotline to heaven and was of course part of the Trinity, I believe he still had to grow in his understanding of his calling. In that way he could be a real model for us to follow after. As he spoke these words in the synagogue, he was speaking out revelation of who he was and what he had come to do. We are encouraged to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in 1 Peter 2. So it is his desire that we understand what we are to do and that we have a vision to live out.

Jesus is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. God knows the end and is moving human history towards it. He is creating for himself a beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle. Without the end in mind, I'd sure be discouraged. Some years ago, my wife started a preschool in Paisley.

But it wasn't just a preschool, it was a ministry in the heart of God to reach children and families around the world. One year into the vision, there were 20 pre-schoolers meeting each morning with a small team of teachers. One of those teachers had a reflective moment and looked at her life. Here she was, spending her most valuable years with a few 3-5 year olds. What was it all about? It was time for being reminded of the big picture. It's like drops of water forming small waves on a pond. In years to come those 3-5 year olds were going to be adults with a Biblical basis in their lives. That preschool would have trained many teachers to take the vision around the globe. Those families would attend parenting evenings and come to learn Biblical principles of marriage and family and raising children. Those teachers would form teams to multiply other preschools. From one small act of obedience in starting a preschool comes a much bigger picture and broad vision is birthed. You just need to be reminded often of the big picture so that you don't lose sight of it.

Nehemiah was burdened to hear of the plight of his fellow Israelites. Jerusalem was burned, the walls in ruins and the people scattered. God put a vision in his heart. He wasn't burdened for a wall to be built. No. It was for a people to be re-born, a city to be birthed, and a nation to rise once more to its God given calling. His prayer was, "Lord where do I start?" The answer came in building a wall. His response: "A wall? Yeah, I can do that." So off he went with a huge vision and a first small task towards it.

So are you living out your passion? Jesus had a passion to serve and not to be served. David speaks of, "one thing I desire of the Lord and that will I seek after." (Psalm 27)

Question:

What is the one thing that you want to do for the Lord? If you don't know, take some time to ask the Lord. How is that passion going to be realised? What kind of activities, ministries and strategies will you use? Jesus wanted to pass the truth on to others and decided to start a mobile team of 12 men. It was a radical approach with very little classroom time but lots of practice in the market place. What approaches will *you* take to fulfil your passion? Bring joy to Jesus as you focus on his purpose for you.

Prayer:

O Lord, let me not live to be useless!

Bishop Stratford -1707

Day 24. Worth their weight in gold - resourceful mentors

“You can impress people from a distance but you can only impact them up close.” Howard Hendricks

Philippians 2:19-20 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

“I have no one else like him.” I am a very fortunate, blessed person. Over the years, I have had so many people that have impacted my life and who have had a part in shaping who I have become. During a course in leadership, I was asked to share something that I’m proud of in my life - an accomplishment, a skill. I thought for a moment; it didn’t take long, as the list wasn’t that big. All I have done, I could link to the encouragement, the advice, the mentoring of others in my life. All the things I could be thrilled about, others had much to do with them.

My mother believed in me from the beginning. It seemed no matter what challenge has faced me, she’s been positive and believed I could do it. My music teacher inspired me to play and to keep pressing in to gain skill. In fact I was a little afraid of her, which made me practise all the more - but it worked. An old man who we called ‘Skipper’ would often come over to our house for meals. He was a wonderful musician who had led a singing team that my dad had been a part of. I watched with eagerness the chord shapes and the progressions he made. This was different from my classical piano lessons. This was playing by ear, no music notes to follow. Over several years, there was “no one like him” to capture my heart in music. He drew out of me the songs yet in seed form.

Every Thursday night for some years as a teenager, I went to a Bible study led by the director of a children’s home who had such a grasp of the Bible. He gave me a love for the Bible like no other.

At university, a couple of guys just a year or two older than me, who had come from similar backgrounds as me, spent many hours showing me the joy of being filled with the Spirit. After two years of their gracious sharing and patience, I gave in, recognising a great need in my life. What a resource they became for me.

I arrived at DTS to find a wonderful Bible teacher called Barry. It felt like being born again all over again. Every session required some application and I found myself soaking up every word and seeing my life transformed as I responded.

I can think of a spiritual father who we saw every six months or so, who'd give me perspective and encourage me to stay on track; or another spiritual father who has helped me through every major decision and transition from the age of twenty two until now. The list goes on - person after person. Why have I been so blessed?

Perhaps the key for me has been to pursue those who can help me. It's very rare for gold just to be sitting there on the surface to take away. Generally you need to dig for it and it's usually found in very small nuggets. Resourceful people are similar. Search for them. Take initiative. Grab them for a meal. Ask them questions. Contact them on a regular basis for advice. That's my secret (Oops, I guess it's not a secret now). Ken McGreavy, an anointed Bible teacher, often used to come to Scotland to teach in our schools. I knew him for many years and he always had that 'word in season' for me. It seems principles and precious truths just flowed from him so easily. So my first question to him whenever I saw him was, "When is your next free moment to have a meal with us?" He was a resourceful person for me. We all need them.

Question:

Who are the resourceful people in your life? Who are you taking initiative towards? For whom are you a resourceful person?

Prayer:

*O God the Father of all
You ask every one of us to spread love where the poor are humiliated
Joy where the church is brought low
And reconciliation where people are divided
Father against son, mother against daughter, husband against wife
Believers against those who cannot believe
Christians against their unloved fellow Christians.
You open this way for us,
So that the wounded body of Jesus Christ, your church,
May be leaven of communion for the poor of the earth
And in the whole human family.*

Brother Roger and Mother Teresa of Calcutta 1940-

Day 25. Do I have to like people?

“Unless life is lived for others, it is not worthwhile.” Mother Teresa

Philippians 2:25-28 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

We often play with words. We talk about not liking people but reaching out and loving them. In other words, I may be harbouring all kinds of feelings and judgements but ‘*I will love you with the love of the Lord.*’ Have you ever had someone come up to you and say something like this: “I need to ask your forgiveness. I’ve had all these negative thoughts towards you since we’ve met and I’ve not liked you. But God’s convicted me and I want to say I love you as a brother.” What do I say? “Well that’s nice - thank you.” This dear brother who I thought was a nice guy has now set up a barrier to developing relationship. It starts me wondering: What do I say and do, that bugs this guy so much? I am aware that there are people in my life who I find annoying because of their personality, leadership style or various idiosyncrasies. There are some people I don’t necessarily click with and who may not become my closest friends, but I still need to like them, don’t I?

In YWAM we have a value of relationships. That should translate into action. So I need to live in such a way that I reach out to people, I communicate with people, I inform people about what they need to know, or ask people’s permission to do things, or their opinion about my doing things. That’s called *respect*. I give people the benefit of the doubt and release them as much as I can, and believe in them to ‘do all that God’s put in their hearts’ - that’s called *trust*. I seek to listen to what they’re saying, asking questions to help clarification, trying to put myself in their situation - that’s called *understanding*. I ask how people are doing, if there’s anything I can do to help; I take initiative and serve

them and encourage them - that's called *care*. All these add up to loving someone... or is it liking someone? Can we do all these things if we really don't like someone?

I find that conflicts often arise out of dislike of the person. In many mediations that I have been involved with, after talking through what he did or said and what she did or said, I have to ask a question. Do you believe this person doesn't like you and purposely set out to hurt you? (I'm sure that does happen on occasions but it hasn't been so in my situations.) The answer is generally the same - rather slow in coming and quietly spoken, but "No." The intent wasn't to hurt and, somewhere along the line, each party believes a lie that the other person doesn't like them or hates them and has all kinds of bad intent.

My wife tells stories from her time as a playground supervisor at a primary school in Scotland. Many Scottish kids by upbringing hate the English. It's usually seen very clearly in football games and politics. So when one of the kids would say, "I don't like the English," my wife would ask, "Who specifically don't you like?" Well, there was no one in particular, it was simply a prejudiced viewpoint. We need to be careful not to get into a frame of mind where we dislike certain people because of their personalities, style of leadership or some trait about them that annoys us. When someone says, "I really like you" or "I like working with you," it means a lot - perhaps even more than using the 'love' word because love has been banded about so much that it has lost its meaning. Paul says, "You are my joy and crown" - you are special, I really like you.

Question:

When was the last time you shared with someone how much you like them and why? Think about your sphere of influence and the people you relate to on a regular basis and ask yourself why you like them. What do you want to say to each one of them over the next few weeks?

Prayer:

O God, you have bound us together in this bundle of life; give us grace to understand how our lives depend on the courage, the industry, the honesty and integrity of our fellow men; that we may be mindful of their needs, grateful for their faithfulness, and faithful in our responsibilities to them; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reinhold Niebuhr 1892-1971

Day 26. Experiencing a growth spurt – get a mentor/coach

“Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man’s growth without destroying his roots.” Frank A. Clark

Philippians 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

My best P.E. class (physical education) at high school was table tennis. For one year I had a teacher who was a brilliant player and who hardly let me win a point. He taught me how to ‘smash’ a ball. The only trouble was, he got them all back - I don’t know how, but he did. Not only that, but he returned the ball so that I could smash it again. It was so much fun. I improved immensely that term. It helped that I liked him and he seemed to like me, and the fact that I paid close attention and put into practice everything he said to me. Only a few opted for table tennis, so we had good one to one time. He helped me develop my strokes and style and became a wonderful coach.

Football wasn’t my forte but I seemed to play a lot. It was always more popular to play centre forward or one of those up front striker roles - they always seemed to get the limelight. However, my coach suggested I play right half - it’s a mid field role. He said, you’ve got stamina, a fast runner, you are good at setting up for the strikers and can get back to help the backs. You might not score so many goals but you’ll be a tremendous support to the whole team. So that was my place and I even became captain playing in this position. It’s important to know your strengths and weaknesses, and coaches help you to deal with them.

A coach needs to have been there before you. They know the game, they’ve mastered skills and, even though they may not be still playing in the same way for the first team, they can impart the skills and values. What would teams be without coaches? A good coach transforms the team.

Paul coached his team well. He believed in them, sent them letters to encourage them, visited them, brought them to himself, and brought out the best in them. He was ‘an example’ to them. He’d done the stuff - preaching, teaching, dealing with evil spirits, doing miracles, receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit - and had lots of near death experiences.

“Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” Paul had analysed the way he did things and formed a pattern that could be

copied. He had established processes or ways of doing things and he made sure that he passed it on.

The problem with coaching is it's behind the scenes - you don't get the limelight on the field. It takes energy and can be very frustrating when those being coached aren't teachable, can't get a hold of the principle or aren't putting enough effort or practice into it. But that's the challenge. Change usually requires coaching. Coaches will work up a sweat with us, get mad at us when they need to, encourage us when we get it right and then cheer us on from the sidelines to keep going.

You might need a coach, but you can be one as well!

Question:

What patterns of life have you established, that you can coach others in?
What patterns do you see in others that you'd like to develop?

Prayer:

*Spirit of God, be wild and free in me.
Batter my proud and stubborn will.
Blow me where you choose.
Break me down if you must.
Refashion me as you will.
Move me powerfully away
from the games I play
in order to try and tame you.
Lead me into the wild places,
the places of dream or scream,
the new frontiers or the total quiet,
the long dark tunnels
or the wide, sunny vistas
to speak to lions,
to move mountains,
to bear tragedy,
to mirror you.*

Celtic prayer.

Day 27. The art of asking questions

There are no foolish questions and no man becomes a fool until he has stopped asking questions” Charles P. Steinmetz

Philippians 2:1 “Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?”

I was sitting, relaxing and drinking a cup of coffee one day. Rite asked me a question: “What are you thinking?” “Oh nothing,” I said. “No, come on, tell me,” she coaxed. “Honestly, I am not thinking anything - I am drinking and relaxing.” A revelation hit us that day. You see, Rite’s mind is never turned off. I, however, can be drinking a cup of coffee and unless I switch the brain on, it can be idle. At night I can also turn a switch in my head and stop thinking and go to sleep. She couldn’t do this. However, I would always get frustrated that Rite would seemingly hear from God so much more quickly than I would. I suddenly realised what the problem was: the switch in my mind was in the off position. Since that time, I have started asking God questions in prayer. Somehow, the formulating of a question and the anticipation of an answer turns my mind on and it helps me to hear so much better.

How does God communicate with you? We read in Genesis that, after speaking creative words into existence, forming the earth and making Adam and Eve to live in it, he asks questions of his new creatures: “Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?” Of course, he knew the answers, but he wanted dialogue.

As we relate with others, especially as leaders, it’s important that we encourage and develop dialogue with those we lead, and move away from monologue. I have some people that never ask me any questions. They always have things to share, they give their own updates and we can talk about all kinds of things, but there are no questions. What does that say to me? Well perhaps that they are not so interested in what I am doing or what I am thinking. I have served under many leaders and it’s an amazing thing when a leader asks you questions: it shows concern, it shows they are open for input and that they are interested in your opinions. In some cultures, leaders would never ask questions, because that would suggest that they don’t have all the answers, and that would not be acceptable. Leaders are supposed to know everything, right?

As a leader, Jesus asked questions all the time. He was just leaving Jericho and there on the roadside was Bartimaeus. He was blind and begging. Jesus asked him what seemed like a silly question: “What do you want me to do for you?” He wanted to enter into dialogue and not presume that he knew what he needed. He also wanted Bartimaeus to think through the implications of his answer.

Jesus entered into dialogue with his disciples continuously. He didn’t simply give answers and formulas but wanted them to think. So he asks questions like: “Why do you call me Lord and not do the things I say? Are you too going to leave me? Who do you say that I am?” He wanted them to think and give their response. A key principle for a teacher to remember is that people will remember the answer far better if *they* were the ones to come up with it, rather than being told it by another.

There are lots of types of questions; the kinds we need are those that will open up our thinking and our relationships with others. Here are some:

Open question: does not invite any particular answer, but opens up discussion or elicits a wide range of answers for creative problem solving.

Closed question: is specific and must be answered with a yes or no, or with details as appropriate.

Fact-finding: is aimed at getting information on a particular subject.

Follow-up: is intended to get more information or to elicit an opinion.

Feedback: is aimed at clarifying initial understanding.

As you read the Bible, ponder it until you hear God asking you a specific question. Then ponder it some more to give your answer. In your relationships, think about the other person and ask questions that are going to be helpful for them, and not just give you the information you need. In your friendships, ask questions that will encourage your relationships to go deeper. As a leader, ask questions of those you lead, to find out their desires, opinions, concerns, and to stimulate them to grow and develop into their potential.

Back to Philippians: What encouragement do you have from belonging to Christ? Where do you run when you need comfort? How do you fellowship in the Spirit? In what ways has your heart become tender and compassionate?

Be a question asker.

Question:

What are some good questions that you can ask your wife, your best friend, your family, your team, the cashier at the bank, your neighbour... Questions create content that build bridges in relationships.

Prayer:

Why, O Lord, is it so hard for me to keep my heart directed toward you? Why do the many little things I want to do, and the many people I know, keep crowding into my mind, even during the hours that I am totally free to be with you and you alone? Why does my mind wander off in so many directions, and why does my heart desire the things that lead me astray? Are you not enough for me? Do I keep doubting your love and care, your mercy and grace? Do I keep wondering, in the centre of my being, whether you will give me all I need if I just keep my eyes on you?

Please accept my distractions, my fatigue, my irritations, and my faithless wanderings. You know me more deeply and fully than I know myself. You love me with a greater love than I can love myself. You even offer me more than I can desire. Look at me, see me in all my misery and inner confusion, and let me sense your presence in the midst of my turmoil. All I can do is show myself to you. Yet, I am afraid to do so. I am afraid that you will reject me. But I know - with the knowledge of faith - that you desire to give me your love. The only thing you ask of me is not to hide from you, not to run away in despair, not to act as if you were a relentless despot.

Take my tired body, my confused mind, and my restless soul into your arms and give me rest, simple quiet rest. Do I ask too much too soon? I should not worry about that. You will let me know. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

Henri Nouwen

Day 28. Being a spiritual mentor

“You cannot hold a torch to light another’s path without brightening your own.” Unknown

Philippians 2:21-24 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

I was twenty nine when I became a dad. What an experience it was, being there for the birth and seeing the miracle of new life. I didn’t go to a school for dads. I learned on route. Those first six months created a steep learning curve and developed new skills in the changing of nappies, cleaning up messes and looking like I was awake when I was actually sleeping. I think I enjoyed it more when the kids got to the age of playing games and creating Lego masterpieces, reading books and having real conversations. However, each phase has its own merits and I wouldn’t want to have missed any of them.

Twenty five years later and I’m still a dad. It’s just more expensive now and they ask me for advice about decisions they are making. I am still responsible as a dad, but not in the same way as I once was. Spiritual parenting is similar in many ways. It always seemed a big leap to think of myself as a spiritual father; I felt more like a peer with people in the mission, but when I hit forty, I began to realise that twenty something’s looked to me more as a parent figure. I guess being in a place of responsibility and authority in the mission helped too. They expected the wisdom of age to be there. I had more life experience and had made more mistakes and hopefully had learned some things to pass on. I had some perspective. I’d been there, bought the T-shirt and could share stories of what I did or didn’t do, what I should have done, what I would do now and so on. That’s what spiritual parenting is all about.

With kids, I don’t have to give a show of authority. I have the authority if they give it to me. It’s like the twenty four year old who is amazed at how much his father has learned in just six years. When he was eighteen, his father knew nothing at all! As a dad, I love my kids, I have been there for them. They haven’t needed to look for me. Now, obviously, many kids have absent fathers or are orphaned and so don’t experience a Dad who is

present - but this wasn't the original plan. The difference with spiritual parents is that we don't always just have them around like this.

Those who have had a spiritual father or mother looking out for them have been privileged. Most of us have had to look for them and pursue them. Let me ask you a question: Whom are you fathering or mothering? I was twenty nine when I had my first child but many are younger. If we can be natural parents we can also be spiritual parents. Have you learned anything? Then you can pass it on to someone else. You can have spiritual kids.

What does spiritual parenting involve? Here is the start of a job description: Being available; giving advice; asking questions; praying and giving prophetic input; being committed to walk through issues as they arise; providing accountability; being an anchor emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and socially; having ambition for them and being a sounding board for the future; being an understanding, non judgemental person to listen and accept them as they are; bringing affirmation.... You can continue the list.

Spiritual parenting is all about being relational and present for people.

Question:

How can you take some spiritual children under your wing? What would or could it look like? What can you do to develop others in their spiritual walk?

Prayer for mentorees:

I kneel before the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Prayer of Paul. Ephesians 3:14-19

Day 29. Putting on the apron

“The difference between a true servant-leader who is servant first, and the leader-servant who seeks leadership first, lies in the growth of the people who serve under them. The test question is, “Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”

Robert Greenleaf

Philippians 2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

Do you ever feel like a doormat, stepped on, used in some way? It's not a nice feeling is it? Have you given money and not been thanked? Done someone a favour and it was taken for granted? Put extra time and energy into a project and it wasn't even noticed?

Whenever my wife goes away for a week, I suddenly think, when was the last time I thanked her for all the cooking, cleaning, washing and caring that she does? It's easy just to take it all for granted.

I had a couple of guys in a team for some time that were in a competitive mode with each other. The challenge was to see who could serve first and most? There was all kinds of banter that went on, but it challenged the rest of us who weren't as quick to volunteer to serve.

In YWAM, I take my hat off to the secretaries and administrators who put on the apron when it comes to serving visions and visionary leaders. They are the ones who work behind the scenes with long hours and often boring jobs, but work the necessary details to enable events and visions to actually take place. Paul says, “Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I and glad and rejoice.” He will do anything for them to grow. He will preach his heart out until midnight, he'll stay for months, he'll take care of his own finance and make tents in his spare time, and he will travel and go through hardships and almost die on many occasions. But it's all worth it to serve people.

We know the story so well of Jesus putting on the apron at the last supper and washing the disciples' feet. This was a job normally done by a servant. None of the disciples volunteered when no servant was available. Perhaps the disciples who organised the event were kicking themselves

for not hiring one. So Jesus steps up and does the job. All their mouths drop open and they learn a big lesson that they'll never forget. Jesus said, "I came to serve not to be served." He lived that out.

So what is the equivalent of washing feet in our culture? How does a leader serve? Perhaps by some of the following:

- by doing things that others don't expect you to do
- by spending more time and energy than others
- by thinking ahead and preparing things for others
- by making things as easy as possible for others
- doing some of the things that others hate
- by volunteering and not needing my arm twisted
- by delegating to others, believing in others, releasing others so their gifts are used and they're fulfilled

Question:

What can you do to serve those you lead?

Prayer:

*Lord Christ,
You remain, unseen,
At our side,
Present like a poor man
Who washes the feet of his friends.
And we,
To follow in your footsteps,
We are here, waiting for you
To suggest signs of sharing
To make us into servants
Of your Gospel.*

Brother Roger 1940?

Day 30. Standing out in the crowd

“Nothing makes it easier to resist temptation than a proper bringing up, a sound set of values, and witnesses.” Franklin P. Jones

Philippians 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life - in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing.

Don't you love those clear nights out in the countryside where, without the disturbance of city lights, the sky is filled with stars that are twinkling and they light up the whole sky? Sometimes, when it's dark enough, you can see the Milky Way and you realise what an incredible universe we live in. I ask myself the question: Do I shine out like a star in the darkness of the crooked and perverse generation I live in?

The sad reality is that the 'stars' in our present entertainment scene shine out for their sexual misconduct, their relational conflicts and their addictive behaviours. They make the news when there's some kind of scandal involved. The 'stars' we know, whether in the entertainment world, the political world, the legal world or the sports world aren't known for integrity. What a shame. As the church, we are to be 'blameless and pure.' Can the world see a difference in us?

We have many fruit trees in our garden and it's always a joy to squeeze fresh orange juice for breakfast in the morning. That pure orange juice tastes so different from the 'pure orange juice' with all the additives you get from the store. As Christians, we are to taste different. We're to be pure - no mixed motives in our relationships. No undercurrents and no working on hidden agendas.

Integrity requires boundaries - things we will do and things we won't do. Integrity requires intentionality - which means you've thought out your values beforehand and don't want to be spontaneous at the moment of temptation. We have to be careful not to cross boundary lines in our relationships that then lack integrity. It also means dealing with shades of grey: what is integrity for one person isn't for another.

Here's a short list of qualities of integrity: following through on commitments; giving honest but not unkind feedback; avoiding the appearance of evil (even when the heart is pure) with inappropriate touch or time management; speaking honourably and with respect for others; being open with your feelings about another or difficulties with another only in appropriate settings; being careful about the details of sharing information with others, even when it's for prayer; not saying one thing and believing another; only making commitments that you have time to fulfill; not name dropping to gain favour; treating everyone with the same positive attitude and care; no favourites and special treatment...

There are no shades of grey in integrity - your relationships are full of integrity or they're not. Can you have slightly pure orange juice or almost pure orange juice? It's either pure or it isn't. Our relationships are the same: let's aim for the pure kind.

Question:

In what ways are you living a life of integrity? Can you say, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ" - with integrity?

Prayer:

*Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
To love what is worth loving,
To praise what delights you most,
To value what is precious in your sight,
To hate what is offensive to you.
Do not let me judge by what I see,
Nor pass sentence according to what I hear,
But to judge rightly between things that differ,
And above all to search out and to do what pleases you,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord*

Thomas a Kempis 1380-1471

Day 31. The foundational quality for leaders

“Few things are harder to put up with than annoyance of a good example.” Mark Twain

Philippians 1:15-18 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Where has all the integrity gone? We live in a society that lacks integrity big time. The sad thing is that surveys show there is no statistical difference between the religious and non religious when it comes to things like falsifying their income tax returns, committing plagiarism, ignoring construction specs, illegally copying computer programmes, stealing time from work, committing phone theft, exaggerating a product, telling people what they want to hear, selectively obeying the laws and bribing to obtain a building permit.

The surprising thing is that when employees are asked what they look for in a boss, integrity comes right at the top. They want to be able to trust their boss. So what is integrity all about? It's that basic character quality that demonstrates congruity between what you say and how you live. The picture I have is of the 'seaside candy rock'. It is in the shape of a rod with up to an inch diameter. Looking at the end of the rod of candy, you can read the name of the seaside resort and that name goes all through the rock. As you suck it from end to end, that same seaside name keeps looking at you. That's how God wants you and me to be: no matter where we are cut, we exhibit the same good truthful quality. The closer people come to us, the better we look. We don't want to be the kind of leaders who someone called 'five feet above men'. They are one person on stage (five feet above) - full of life and good stories and smiles. When they come down from the stage, however, it's a different story and they are not so nice to know!

David was a man of integrity in certain areas. When it came to honouring the King, he had integrity. He was careful not to take Saul's life but just cut off a piece of his robe. David waited patiently for God to exalt him to the role of King. He also had integrity when it came to worshipping the

Lord and making every effort to develop worship leaders and a God fearing nation that would give the Lord his proper place. He responded well to the Lord when he was told it wasn't going to be he who was to build the temple but it was a job for his son. However, in the area of sexual purity, he didn't do so well. Adultery with Bathsheba led to murder of Bathsheba's husband and the loss of his child.

A man or woman of integrity has standards that they uphold. They have boundaries that they don't cross. They have consciences that are clean and sharp. They have reputations that they don't want destroyed. They are people who keep their word. They stick to their principles. They live to please God. Standards of integrity may vary but we each need to live our lives before God in such a way that we believe we are walking in the Spirit.

Paul uncovers some of the leaders of his day in the verses above. If we are serving Christ with integrity, then we will be serving with pure motives, from a heart of love. Make sure your foundation stone is secure.

Question:

If we were to be investigated, would we be found to be the same all the way through - in the dark or in the light, on stage or off, whether we are ministering to the masses or the few?

Prayer:

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Prayer of David. Psalm 51 (edited) - The New Living Translation.

Day 32. The challenge of mammon

When I have money, I get rid of it quickly, lest it find a way into my heart. John Wesley

Philippians 4:15-19 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

I have been praying for a miracle of provision for the last few days. I'm sure you relate. In fact you could probably have asked me every month for the last thirty years of being in YWAM, "What are you praying for?" and I would say for a miracle of provision! If you are a volunteer worker in the same way, do you get tired of that? I do. The danger then is to look for creative ways of financing!

Paul understood what it was to be in need. From all the letters he sent to all the churches, there was no response apart from the Philippians. These were friends. People who'd come to the Lord. People he'd served. Paul shares his delight, not in the gift but in the reward they would receive. They overflowed with generosity. I like the fact that prosperity is defined by how much we give and not by how much we receive. Some will never prove the principle that 'it's more blessed to give than receive' - they are the ones missing out.

Back to the temptations: are we tempted to cut corners on finance, to squeeze out as much personal benefit as possible from office budgets, to blur the definition between personal and ministry funds, to be over extravagant with our wants and end up not having enough for obligations and needs?

Money matters, because Jesus said "if we are faithful with the little, he will be able to give us much, and we will only be given spiritual responsibilities once we are responsible with material things."

Money is so black and white. This is how much I have, this is how much I need. Whenever it seems that money is becoming a shade of grey, then it's time to be concerned. When in doubt about money issues or potential conflicts of interests, then share with the leadership team or objective people who think in black and white terms and don't round off to the nearest hundred. Where there are shared decisions, there is more safety.

As a leader, make sure you never make financial decisions alone. Don't be the one or don't allow another person to be the receiver of cash alone, but rather have two people. When you are claiming money back from accounts, have another leader sign off for you. Be clear what expenses are for the ministry and what expenses are yours personally, and create clear policies. These and simple policies like them should be set in place to protect you as a leader and the leaders you work with. It's all too easy to slip money into your own pocket that doesn't belong to you. We are to avoid all appearances of evil in this area as well as in the sexual arena.

At the end of the day, all our money belongs to God anyway and he allows us to be stewards of it. So be prepared now and then for the test of giving it all away. Paul reminds us that our "God meets all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ."

If we keep our passion on Jesus, we don't give the devil an opportunity of turning our passion towards money - or should I say mammon.

Question:

How aware are we of our money and our budget? Are we clear about how much we are giving, receiving and saving? Jesus watched the widow putting money into the offering and praised her - would he do the same for us?

Prayer:

*Lord, take away all penny-pinching from me.
Give me a generous heart and a helping hand
for every person and every creature I meet.
And thank you that this will bring blessing.*

Celtic prayer.

Day 33. Speaking God's affirmation

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2

Philippians 1:6 ... that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:18-19 Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Some words have power to frighten us and silence us. I remember some years ago when people talked about 'church planting,' it seemed such a difficult thing to do. It created an image of needing such big faith for incredible amounts of money to buy property. It raised the expectation of being the ultimate evangelist to convert people on the streets to join the congregation. It challenged me to evaluate whether I had the gifts to teach and administrate and do all the 'stuff' necessary. There were hurdles a mile high and no one wanted to try. But then the bar was lowered. Church was redefined as a small group of people who want to love and serve Jesus. As I look back I have been involved in quite a number of church plants since having a fresh revelation of what it actually meant.

The same issue arose with gifts of the spirit. Somehow the bar was raised so high that only the really gifted prophets could speak in public meetings or dare to share a word with someone. How sad! What are the gifts of the spirit in basic form? They are hearing what Jesus is saying to us. Personal prophecy is simply hearing God for someone else through a scripture, thought, impression or picture.

If we can hear God speaking to us on a day-to-day basis, then we can hear God speaking to us for someone else on a day-to-day basis. That simply means that we are obeying scripture (1 Corinthians 14:31) and we are prophesying one by one. Why? To strengthen, encourage and comfort one another. (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Prophecy is a tool that God gives so that the body can affirm his children. God always has all kinds of wonderful things to share with us, but often as individuals we don't get his full message when we listen to the Lord

ourselves. Sometimes it's a matter of our negative thinking, "Oh, that's just my own thoughts." Sometimes we just don't sit and focus for long enough. Sometimes there can be other blockages that stop us receiving God's word to us. However, when someone else brings a word from God to us, we have to stop and think and receive it into our spirits.

Why don't we prophesy more? Generally it's because we are not engaged in our spirits to be asking the question, "Lord, what do you want to say to whom today?" The next time you enter a room, ask the question. "Lord, do you have a message for someone here?" The answer is generally yes.

I realise that when I travel to other nations and communities, I often have a greater impact than when I minister to my own team or in my own community. Have you had that experience? Now, part of it is that a prophet isn't given honour in his hometown. Okay, that can be true, but another reason is that when we are travelling away, we tend to spend more time asking God what we are to do and, on top of that, have higher expectations ourselves and meet higher expectations in the people.

So it may take a little more faith, but take some time to prepare yourself on a daily basis for whoever you may meet. Today, be ready to share a word with someone. It may be like the word Paul shared with the Philippians: *"Don't give up or get weary; what God has started in you he is going to continue. He, in fact, is more committed to your growth and development than even you are. So hang in there."* Be God's mouthpiece today and affirm people all around you with the words of Jesus.

Question:

What questions do you have on your heart for the Lord today? Ask them, expecting some answers. What questions do you have on others' behalf today? When you hear something, be committed to go and share what you receive! (as long as it is strengthening, encouraging and comforting.)

Prayer:

*I pray, Lord, for the children whom I know.
Help me to encourage them
To listen to the thoughts and pictures
You put into their minds.
Help me to receive humbly what they tell me,
And to keep my ears wide open
For your voice coming to me through them.*

Celtic prayer

Day 34. The power of proclamation

“The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” Michelangelo

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

It's easy to fall into the trap of throwing out the baby with the bath water. There's been a reaction to the faith teaching and the 'name it and claim it' theology. However, there is an important principle of speaking out positive things. Positive confession is good as long as it doesn't cross the line of deception. I don't want to be claiming things in a presumptuous way but I do want to proclaim who God is and what he has said to me. In this world, we often don't get much encouragement and in fact the reality is that we often live in an anti-Christian environment where we face hostility. So let's remind ourselves of who our God is. He is mighty to save, he is Lord of heaven and earth, he is our good Shepherd and Jehovah Jireh and a thousand and one other things too.

As well as confessing who God is and what he's said, I want to proclaim who I believe God wants me to be and what he wants me to do.

Paul says, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." In the midst of difficult circumstances, of discouragements and a sense of weakness, he presses on and positively confesses. Something happens inside of us when we speak out boldly. I can't imagine Paul whispering, "I press on." He spoke it with strength and conviction. When we do that, our spirit wakes up and we speak from our spirit and not just our mind. Real proclamations come from within - they are faith filled words that are powerful and creative.

God proclaimed at the beginning of the world, "Let there be light," and there was. When we say under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, 'I will not be afraid', 'I will give thanks', 'I trust you God in your unfailing love' 'You are my hiding place, I find refuge in you,' these words become real. Jesus said. "The words that I speak are spirit and they are life" John

6:63. They were spiritual words of power. As we learn to proclaim in the Spirit, we will see a new world open up and transformation taking place in our life and the lives of those around us.

Question:

Is there a situation today in your family, in your ministry, over your personal life where you need to proclaim God's presence and power? Remind yourself of some of God's promises and pray them over the situations. Read Psalm 23 or any other scripture that is meaningful to you and pray them verse-by-verse over the situation.

Prayer:

*Be off, Satan, from this door and from these four walls,
This is no place for you; there is nothing for you to do here.
This is where I mean to sleep, now that my worship is done,
In the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit.*

One of the earliest Christian prayers recorded.

Day 35. Living out the one another's

If you want happiness...
For an hour - take a nap
For a day - go fishing
For a month - get married
For a year - inherit a fortune
For a lifetime - help someone else
Chinese proverb

Philippians 1:3-8 I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

I heard a story of a Christian leader on a plane. He started up a conversation with the guy sitting next to him who turned out to be a psychiatrist. He had had a Christian background and conversation began flowing. He asked the Christian leader a question: "Do you know the one another's of scripture? If the church really *lived* those one another's, I'd be out of a job!" That kind of community would be radical. Jesus said, "By this will all men know that you are my disciples" - not by how much travelling they did to other nations, not by becoming workaholics and being driven to reach every people group, not by having the best set of goals written and followed through on, but by living out the one another's.

There has been an on-going challenge for missions agencies and churches over the years and it's between the importance of people and the importance of the task. Jesus left us with the great commandments of loving God and loving one another. He also left us with the great commission of fulfilling the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. The stereotypical result is that the local church comes down on the loving one another side and missions takes up the task challenge. If you had to choose between them, which would you say is the most important?

As someone who has been in missions for over 30 years now, I have to say that there seems to be overwhelming evidence that actually relationships are the most important. Why does there have to be such a divide? Why does a focus on missions somehow blind us to the fact that people need to be loved - missionaries need to be loved and cared for? We all need to experience the one another's on a daily basis. We have been made that way.

The Trinity has always enjoyed relationship. They have been a small community enjoying one another and living out those one another values. Without putting them into action, we just don't function properly. It's like trying to make a car go without putting gas in, or expecting a body to live without blood flowing. The one another's are our basic foundation to life and community.

Today, be conscious of the words you say, the actions you perform and the attitudes of your heart, and ask the Lord to help you with your people focus. To love one another, to carry one another's burdens, to forgive one another, to be patient with one another, to confess your sins to one another, to encourage one another, to comfort one another, to admonish one another, to ...

Question:

Which of the one another's are you stronger in and which ones are you weaker in? Which ones will you focus on today?

Prayer:

Give me a desire to see others reach their greatness;

Give me a word to help another grow.

May petty ways drop from us like scales.

Step by step you lead us.

Feed and remake us

Till we are glad to be givers,

Till we joy in being brothers,

Till we delight in being sisters,

Till heaven laughs in delight

At our pleasure in each other.

Celtic prayer

Day 36. Personal check-up time

“It’s not what you are that holds you back, it’s what you think you are not.” Denis Waitley

Philippians 3:7-11 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Most countries have a special testing for vehicles on a regular basis. In the UK, cars have to be tested every year for general roadworthiness. Things like the lights, windscreen washer and wipers, tyres, exhaust emissions, brakes and bodywork have to come up to a certain standard. As a general rule, especially when you are short of money, there is work needing to be done. One year, I had a warning light blink on the dashboard and the mechanic couldn’t find out what was wrong, so his suggestion was to disable the light. Several months later, the whole engine seized up. We ignore warning lights to our peril.

When was the last time you had a personal check up? Been to the doctors lately? How’s your blood pressure, cholesterol level and general fitness? These days, most of us tend to be doing too much and consequently are struggling with stress of one kind or another. Are you aware of your stress level? What about your social life? What kind of social support in terms of friends, family and co-workers do you have? The area that often gets the least attention is our spiritual life. From the scripture above, it sounds like Paul was putting himself through a spiritual check-up. I imagine Paul putting two columns in his journal - profit for me and profit for Christ. Then he started thinking about all he was doing, and writing in the appropriate column. Anything ending up in the profit for me column was now considered the loss account, and anything in the profit for Christ column was the profit account. Then he went a step further and said that anything that wasn’t encouraging a greater knowledge of Jesus was like rubbish.

A personal check-up like that can be very challenging. I suggest that you do a check up every 3 to 6 months, but focus on one aspect of your life and don't be overwhelmed by trying to work in too many areas all at the same time.

Paul was in a season of focusing on the righteousness that comes from God and not a righteousness of his own. Here are some questions you could ask for a quick check-up:

- Is my calling and vision clear?
- Am I happy about who I am?
- Is my passion hot?
- Are my ears open to the spirit's whisper?
- Is my heart after God? My DNA becoming holy?
- Am I pursuing love and subduing pride?
- Am I a life long learner and implementor?
- Am I extravagantly generous?
- Are my fears at bay and my joy full?
- Am I able to make the right choices?
- Is my personality submitted to Christ?
- Am I eating nutritiously, exercising regularly and sleeping contentedly?
- Are my sexual desires appropriate and under control?
- Is my leisure time fulfilling and enjoyable?
- Are my gifts developing?

Question:

How did you do? Now the real work starts. What are some growth steps in the area the Holy Spirit is putting his finger on?

Prayer:

Dear God, make me think about what I'm doing with my mind, with my body, with my habits, with my study, with my friends, with my hopes, with my parents, with my faith, with life.

Carl Burke 1917-

Day 37. Why is it so hard to agree?

“Conflict cannot survive without your participation.” Unknown

Philippians 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

“Agree with each other.” I have just been involved in a situation where hurtful things were written about someone behind their back and they subsequently read them and confronted the individual concerned. What can you say? You can say sorry but you can’t take the words back. They are there in black and white as evidence and they sit to be thought about and to help keep a big gulf between the two parties.

We have all thought things that we’d be horrified at others reading; we are all guilty. Things that others have said and done to us have also hurt us all. We have probably reacted back with our own words and actions. There are always two sides to a story but there is still no excuse.

Why is agreeing so hard? In my experience it’s often hard because we aren’t honest. We don’t share our feelings and our opinions with a calmness of spirit. We jump to judgement, criticism and accusation. We put down, gossip, malign and plot murder (even if it’s just in our thoughts). Agreeing is a kingdom quality. There is real power in agreement and the enemy is scared to death of it. “*Where two or three agree concerning anything, it shall be done for them,*” Jesus said. Wow! Why can’t we do more of that? No, we need the urging of Paul and other leaders and mediators to come alongside us to stop us tearing one another apart, holding offences and withdrawing our spirits from one another.

Have you ever thought that conflict and lack of agreement are a spiritual warfare issue? The fact is, the enemy uses it extensively to bring division and strife among people. More than that, it doesn’t stop with just two people not agreeing; we then go on to form sides and parties and create all out war. I remember reading about Yonggi Cho’s strategy whenever a conflict arose in a marriage. He would go to prayer and come against the enemy’s strategies in their lives. Often, in visiting the couple, the issue would have already been dealt with by the time he arrived. Sometimes we just don’t realise how the enemy plays with us and messes us around. Of course, another reason conflicts and lack of agreement arise is the root issues of pride, competition and independence. To come against

these strongholds takes humility. For instance it takes humility to say, "Let's go with your idea," or "Sorry, I was wrong," or "Well done, you deserve the prize."

We don't have too many leaders these days pleading to agree. Perhaps if we cared a little more, we too would be doing more pleading like Paul. We miss out on so much blessing because of our lack of agreement.

Why not try an experiment and agree with some people? See what happens!

Question:

What stops or hinders you from being able to agree? What do you do that hinders others from agreeing? How can you rid yourself of conflict?

Prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.*

Francis of Assisi 1181-1226

Day 38. Finding peace in the storm

“Whenever peace does not come, tarry until it does, or find out the reason why it does not.” Oswald Chambers.

Philippians 4:11-13 For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Job’s journey was one of experiencing many storms. He went through the trauma of losing his family, his business and his possessions in a very short space of time. Amazingly, in the midst of the storm, he continued to trust the Lord even when he had no answers for all his questions. Without understanding, it’s always harder to go through the storms of life with a calm spirit. Sometimes we will never know fully what was going on.

You, like Paul, have probably known times of abundance and times of want. Sometimes the seasons of want come from losing all you have had. In those situations, it’s easy to respond with frustration, anger, depression and hopelessness. However, Paul says he found “*the secret of being content, no matter what was happening.*”

Everything can be going fine, then crisis hits. A traumatic event takes place. A loved one dies, a major conflict in relationship or ministry hits the fan, there is a financial crunch, you are faced with a debilitating sickness or a thousand and one other possibilities. Any one of them is able to rob us of our joy and desire to keep moving forward. We feel like escaping somewhere - like heading off to a cave to retreat from life.

So, back to the secret! God is always drawing us into the secret place of his presence to bring fresh perspective and bring us back to contentment in him. Sometimes he only becomes all we *need* when he is all we *have*! It takes hitting rock bottom to make us realise it.

So it’s not a secret at all really - it’s more of a revelation that I, on my own, with my own strength, doing my own thing, using my own wisdom, and trusting in my own resources, can do *absolutely nothing*. That’s zero. What a shame that we need such a revelation to bring that home to us. Once we have got there, though, we can start to really live through Jesus, who is the one who gives us strength.

Rite and I have just gone through a year we call “our year of losses.” Anything that could be shaken has been shaken: finances, housing, family, possessions, health, etc. When you come to a place of knowing *you* really can’t do anything, that’s when Jesus rubs his hands together and says, “At last; now I can start working.”

I remember Joy Dawson speaking years ago on this verse and getting the whole congregation to keep speaking it out - “I can’t.... but He can..... in me.... Now.” The bottom line is whatever Jesus asks us to do, we can do through the strength he gives us. What a joy!

Question:

So I guess the 64,000 dollar question is, “have you learned to be content whatever the circumstances?” If not, what will it take to learn the lesson and do you actually want to learn it?

Prayer:

Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.

Prayer of Jesus. Mark 14:36

Day 39. Knowing where you've been

“Too much can be lost by not looking back over an event and considering what can be learnt from the situation.” Graham Fawcett

Philippians 3:7-8 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ

When you think back over the last few months, has life become a blur? For many years, I didn't know about debriefing and got back from a trip and was immediately immersed into the work at home. Life went from one project to the next, from one event to the next and it all merged into one lump of work. There was never time to find out how the last thing had gone, before being in the middle of the next.

Jesus sent out the twelve to preach and heal the sick and, when they regrouped, Jesus asked questions and got a report of what had happened. Jesus then gave revelation of what was really happening: “*Satan was falling from heaven.*” That meant, the disciples were having an impact. Paul also looks back on his life. He had been so zealous as a Pharisee. He was famous in his time. He'd made a name for himself by routing out the Christians. As he looked back, he realised how pointless it had all been. He had been centering life around himself, to his profit and now he recognised on the Damascus road that Christ was the centre. Everything else is worthless in comparison.

Ask yourself some questions:

- What has been worthwhile, and produced fruit?
- What have I learned about God, others, the task and myself?
- What will I do differently next time?
- What can I be thankful for?

You can debrief any event, season or period of years. At mid life, it can be your whole life up to that point. It can be a span of years where you have been working in a specific role. It could be over the past year or just a few months working on a project. It can be a day or a meeting. Our life is made up of moments and they need debriefing. It doesn't have to take

long but it does take some reflection and question asking and is best done with a paper and pen to write down your findings.

Without debriefing, many lessons aren't learned and many doors are left open that should be shut. Some years ago, I went through a particularly difficult experience with a leader. I thought I had dealt with it all until I visited the facility where he had been leading. A group of us had gone back to pray. Suddenly I was aware that I was very emotional and many memories were being re-lived from this previously difficult time. I realised very quickly that my debriefing hadn't been complete. Thankfully the team with me was able to process me through it and bring closure on a difficult season. Out of that time, I learned some important lessons that now can bring life. God is in the business of redeeming everything we go through.

Happy debriefing.

Question:

What experiences, events, or seasons still need some closure in your life? Take time to do some debriefing.

Prayer:

*And now unto him who is able to keep us from falling
And lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright
mountain of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the
daybreak of joy; to him be power and authority, for ever
and ever.*

Martin Luther King 1928-1968

Day 40. Living by our values

“Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.” C.S. Lewis

Philippians 1:20-22 Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me.

Jesus told a parable about a field with treasure in it. The person who discovered it, went and sold everything they had in order to buy that field - they knew it was so valuable. You do what you know to be valuable. Crises usually show us what is valuable or priority to us. We have friends who recently went through the trauma of their son being diagnosed with leukaemia. Suddenly nothing else mattered. Everything was put on hold to visit doctors, to summon prayer support and to see their child well again.

For Paul, Jesus was a foundational value in his life. He lived for Jesus to be glorified - whether through his life or death. His whole life focused around pleasing Jesus - whatever it took. Things that are values always take priority. We can say nice things, but our actions and behaviour show us what our values really are. How would you answer the question, “What are the three most important things you can do to grow in your relationship with God?” Take a moment and answer the question before moving on. The second question is, “What are the three things you make sure you do every day?” Were the three answers written down the same? Perhaps your answers were more like: get enough sleep, get enough to eat, get my needs or desires met!

We can understand a lot of truth about Jesus and our living for him. It's only when that truth becomes personalised and put into practice on a regular basis that it becomes a value to us. Values don't need deep thought; they tend to flow from within us. A value is a passion for something within us. I grew up in a church where there was a lot of blessed thoughts shared, but not necessarily practical or life changing application of thought. That for me has become one of my values - making theology practical, making application the focus, and not the delight in great ideas.

I grew up in an open home, and so did my wife; as a result of that, and seeing how Jesus has encouraged us to be hospitable, we go out of our

way to welcome people, bless them and try to make them feel special. It's a value - we don't have to think hard about it or even pray about it. It is part of who we are. Values are like that.

What are some of the important things you want to share with your kids? What would be some of the key issues you would share in passing on your job? What kind of things do you look for in finding a new home church? What attracts you to people that you want to spend time with?

All these questions are looking at your values in various areas. We can often tell a value that we hold when there is a possibility of it not happening. Our anger or irritation shows that it means a lot to us.

Remember, values are principles made personal, so there is no clinical following of patterns. Values are lived out from the inside and flow naturally in our lives.

Question:

Take some time to think: What are your values in the workplace, in your relationships, in your church, in your marriage or with your best friend and in your family life? Are you aware of living day by day out of your values?

Prayer:

*Lord of my heart,
give me vision to inspire me
that, working or resting, I may always think of you.*

*Lord of my heart,
give me light to guide me
that, at home or abroad, I may always walk in your way.*

*Lord of my heart,
give me wisdom to direct me
that, thinking or acting, I may always discern right from wrong.*

*Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall me,
rule over my thoughts and feelings, my words and actions.*

Ancient Irish prayer.